DOCTORAL THESIS

Representations of Ageing in a selection of women's magazines a textual and semiotic analysis

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Award date:
2009

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

Representations of Ageing in a selection of women's magazines:

a textual and semiotic analysis

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

School of Arts

Roehampton University

2009

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines representations of ageing in women's magazines. Although ageing is an inevitable part of the human condition, this thesis takes the position that ageing is culturally constructed and that women's magazines are a key site in such constructions. It is noticeable that, within the Academy generally, there has been less work into the social construction of the ageing process than there has been into other relations of 'difference' such as gender or race. That said, in the last two decades, work in this area has started to emerge. Factors which account for this include the influence of the baby boomer generation, a sizeable age cohort, born between 1945-1964 who are now growing older themselves.

The thesis presents a textual and semiotic analysis of the way in which getting older is constituted through written, visual and spoken texts. The primary data in the research consists of articles from women's magazines, analysed using a range of semiotic and linguistic tools, most notably the theories of Roland Barthes, particularly his concept of 'Myth'. Metonymy and the function of stereotyping are also key theoretical concepts. In addition, I analyse data from transcriptions of informal interviews with women magazine readers drawing on the same theoretical concepts. In this way, I am able to examine how magazine texts are received by their readership and, moreover, how women position themselves in relation to what they are reading.

The analysis is underpinned by three Myths of Ageing: firstly, that ageing is a decline scenario: it involves both mental and physical decline; secondly, that ageing is synonymous with loss of power: sexual, economic and social; and lastly that ageing must be resisted. I show how the 'new positive' images of growing older that are being drawn out and portrayed in media representations are not necessarily positive in terms of the impact they have on contemporary women. These images are presented as 'new', but I shall demonstrate that they are, in fact, a re-working of the underlying Myths of Ageing, myths which construct ageing as a culturally very negative experience, particularly for women in this historical moment.

Contents

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents,
Anita & Shanti Rudra

I'd like to thank Professor Jen Coates, my supervisor and Dr Annabelle Mooney, my co-supervisor. To both of you, thank you for all of your advice and support, both academic and otherwise, for believing that the thesis would eventually get done even when I didn't. I'm indebted to you both in more ways than I can ever say and this acknowledgement does not do justice to just how grateful I am towards you both.

Thank you to all my interview informants who freely gave their time by agreeing to take part in the research

I'd like to also thank all the staff at Roehampton University for teaching me so much and for giving me the chance. And I'm profoundly grateful to Roehampton University itself for granting me the bursary to do the thesis in the first place.

My thanks as well to the scholars at the Centre for Language and Communication Research, Cardiff University, who started me off in the right direction, with the research that they have done into the field of ageing.

Finally, thank you to Angela and Lee who were there for me and of course to everyone at home who put up with me.

July 2009

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Thesis

In this thesis I give an account of the research I have done on the theme of age and ageing. My aim in the thesis is to show how growing older is constructed in Women's magazines. I am also concerned with how older women perceive the ageing process, their attitudes and feelings towards it and what is written about it in the magazines.

The research consists of two major strands of evidence: the first strand involves a textual analysis of various articles from several genres found in contemporary British women's magazines, using a linguistic and semiotic framework for analysis. The second strand takes the form of an analysis of the transcriptions from a series of semi-structured interviews with magazine readers over the age of 35. This chapter, therefore, outlines the aims and objectives of the research that has been carried out and, in addition, provides a map for the rest of the thesis. I start by considering how the research topic came to be conceived initially, before setting out the rationale for the approach I take. Next, I outline the structure of the thesis, and this will include brief summaries of the content of the individual chapters that follow. Within this summary I note the autobiographical nature of my decision to pursue a research topic focussing on what could broadly be considered as the social construction of ageing. It was my starting point, and informed my decisions of what I wanted to know: how big a part does chronological age play in both a person's self perception and how others see and react towards that person? My own position as an older, midlife woman motivated me to pursue a research topic in this area. I make the point that I consider the effect of my own position as analyst and author in this research at various stages within the thesis.

Preliminary investigations revealed a lack of research to date, particularly in my own discipline of sociolinguistics (this is detailed in Chapter 2), although it should be acknowledged that there is a (growing) body of knowledge and scholarly research within other academic fields, most notably cultural studies. It seemed an appropriate step, therefore, to investigate the relationship between biological and social ageing, and at the same time, contribute to an area of research which, arguably, needs greater consideration if, for no other reason than that which Kathleen Woodward (1999:x) reminds us: '...age - in the sense of *older* age – is the one difference we are all likely to live into'. Not only am I hoping to make a contribution to the important work in the field of Age Studies, but I aim to add my work to the small but growing body of research which has been conducted within my own academic field, that of sociolinguistics.

One other extremely important and relevant aspect that needs to be factored in is the fact that those who have come to be known as the 'baby boomer generation' are likely to be heavily implicated in what appears to be a redefinition and a redesign of how it is to be an older person, something which seems to be occurring at the present time. This is because the baby boomer generation are a significantly large age cohort, born in the post war years between 1945 and 1964. They are significant because of their sheer numbers, and because they share certain generational characteristics which do not apply to the generations preceding or following them. They have not been subject to large scale military conflict in their lifetime, and they are the first generation to have lived within a consumer culture all of their lives. In addition, they have more disposable income than other generational groups (see, for example, Huber & Skidmore, 2003). All of this combines with a desire to push the boundaries of

acceptability and to challenge hierarchical structures, and this includes a refusal to conform to hitherto more traditional models of growing old. The hypothesis, then, around which this thesis is based, is that what it means to be an 'older' person in Britain today is being re-negotiated and re-defined in a more positive way. I chose women's magazine texts to test this hypothesis, and identified three Myths (Barthes, 1972) of Ageing. The Myths are:

- that ageing is a decline scenario: it involves both mental and physical decline;
- that ageing is synonymous with loss of power: sexual, economic and social; and
- that ageing must be resisted.

Myth, according to Barthes (1972), describes something that is commonsense or 'obvious' in our society and, therefore, something which becomes quite hard to challenge. The concept of myth is outlined within this chapter and dealt with more fully in Chapter 4. In addition, the analysis and interpretation I carried out was based on the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What representations (that is, what constructions of reality) of age and ageing are portrayed and promoted in women's magazines aimed at the 35-60 year old market (i.e. the so-called "mid-life" category)?

RQ2: Is the construction of an 'age identity' underpinned by the Myths of Ageing which I have identified?

RQ3: What are the main linguistic and semiotic devices deployed in these representations?

RQ4: What is the relationship between the representations in the media texts and the attitudes and perceptions towards age and ageing of the readers of those magazines? In other words, how is meaning derived from these texts?

I chose women's magazines as the site for analysis and interpretation because of their availability and due to the fact that they are very prominent in many locations (news stands, doctors' surgeries, other waiting areas, libraries and online) and, further, because it can be argued that they provide identity information for women (Johnston & Swanson,2003a:24). A linguistic and semiotic analysis of the representations of ageing within selected genres from the magazines (the first strand of the research) is therefore appropriate and will contribute to the small, but growing body of knowledge dedicated to unravelling the cultural construction of ageing in Western societies. The second strand of the research, the interviews with magazine readers, will inform judgement of both the analyst's (that is, my own) interpretation of the written material and perhaps also highlights themes and ideas the magazines may not explicitly refer to. I will now consider each chapter of the thesis in turn.

Chapter 2 maps out a review of the relevant literature and provides a starting point for this project, by outlining not only the work that has been done to date, but by contextualising my own study within it. It draws together scholarly research connected with age and ageing. I consider the implication of age as a biological marker, and the relevance this may have in very traditional approaches to research. But I also consider age as socially constructed and in this regard, particularly, I have gone further than considering research connected with my own discipline of sociolinguistics, and crossed into fields such as social theory, psychology and cultural studies, as well as others. I have taken this approach for several reasons: not least because, as I have noted above, from the very beginning of the project, it quickly became apparent that research into age and ageing within sociolinguistics has been scarce up until the last decade (see Coupland, N (2002) for a discussion of this issue). It is also important, however, to consider the centrality that ageing occupies in all our lives and in order to do that, one would be advised to consider a range of perspectives on the biological

and social construction of ageing and this can only be done by taking a broad, interdisciplinary view. I accept, however, the possibility that this view could be argued against in the sense that, firstly, some may take the view that it is more appropriate to avoid giving consideration, both scholarly and otherwise, to ageing at all, given its very negative implications (a fact which may account for the lack of research until recent times, see Coupland, N, 2002). Secondly, I accept that a possible approach would be to consider scholarly work undertaken only within sociolinguistics thus far. However, I argue that this must be a multidisciplinary study precisely because that is the only way to take into consideration the many aspects involved in the social nature of ageing and to deconstruct the effects of ageing which are surely and unequivocally more than just the biological. In Chapter 2 I conclude by giving an account of the British women's magazines selected for the study, from which the articles analysed in later chapters are drawn.

Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology. It covers the practical decisions that are made in any research project of this size, which centre around the question: 'What is the most appropriate way of conducting an investigation into the phenomena under consideration?' Drawing on Johnston & Swanson (2003a:24), I have stated the case for the use of contemporary women's magazines as a site of study. They function as cultural manuals for women, modelling and demonstrating appropriate and desirable behaviour in most aspects of daily life. In addition, their ready availability in many locations means they are accessible to a great number of women. These factors alone make them worthy of study. Furthermore, the fact that they contain visual images in addition to writing makes them compelling and plausible material for a project such as this. The problem with this, however, is that the insights and conclusions gained from an analysis of various genres within the magazines will be my own, and my interpretation, however valid I might argue it to be, may

not be the same as other magazine readers, of which I am only one. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to add another strand to the research by conducting a series of semi structured interviews with other magazine readers. Considerations of validity and verification for my analysis of the written textual material were paramount in the decision to conduct interviews.

While the interviews go some way towards adding support to my analysis, or, in some cases, offering different interpretations, once again I have to offer my own analysis of what my informants are saying. An objective report is not possible. However, one can take steps to account for one's own position within the research process and the effects that it can have. This is principally by being reflexive which means acknowledging that detachment from the research process is not possible. Within the thesis, this involves making explicit my awareness of the fact that this is my version and interpretation of what is relevant or important to include and only one of many alternatives that could have been written. This point extends to the whole research process, the material that has been selected for inclusion (and by implication, what has been left out), the interpretations I have made and the conclusions I have come to (see Horton-Salway, 2001; Wynne, 1988). I have chosen to steer a middle path between simply an acknowledgement of my own position and the production of a completely reflexive thesis such as that produced by, for example, MacMillan (1996).

In **Chapter 4** I build a theoretical framework appropriate to the task in hand. The process involves selecting tools which could be used in an analysis of both text and talk and establishing a framework applicable to the interpretation of media texts or what can loosely be defined as popular culture. Media texts often contain visual images, the interpretation of

which is crucial in any analysis or interpretation of meaning. Semiotic theories are a highly relevant starting point and it is these that I outline first.

Principally, I draw on Barthes's concepts of 'denotation', 'connotation' and 'myth'. I make the point that Barthes applies and reworks what is essentially the Saussurian model of language and so provides a theory with which to analyse cultural texts. Saussure's theory considers that the elements of the language system are signs and each sign can be divided into two: signifier and signified, so any sign is made up of a *signifier* (the name/word) and the *signified* (what the signifier produces). To the denotational meaning of a sign, Barthes adds another level: that of connotation or the socio-cultural associations of a sign. It is what Barthes referred as a secondary level of signification. Connotations which come to be taken for granted as the normal and right meaning of signs Barthes called myths, and they come to be viewed as cultural 'truths' which are very hard to challenge (see Barker & Galasínski, 2001:5). The Myths of Ageing, which I have put forward as a basis for this study, grow from Barthes' theories. Although 'myth' forms the foundation stone on which the theoretical framework is built, I have used other tools both from Barthes and elsewhere. For example, I have used his concept of 'anchorage' and' relay' to describe how readers make meaning of visual images, the connotations of which are pinned down by the written text that accompanies them. Moreover, I consider how meaning is created along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes: what signs have been chosen from those that could have been chosen and how do signs combine to create meaning?

In addition, I consider the concept of stereotyping and how this functions as a powerful tool, both implicitly and explicitly in women's magazines. Drawing on Allport (1979:191), I consider the idea that 'a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category'. It

may not be negative or unfavourable but it provides us with a justification for how we behave towards the category. While a stereotype might not involve a negative portrayal, it can, however, create very negative attitudes (see Itzin, 1986:127). Stereotypes are very effective because we measure ourselves against those we come across, thus reinforcing those stereotypes (see Perkins, 1996:22). Age stereotyping is thus very important in the way that it affects perceptions, ideals and attitudes.

Furthermore, it is clearly important to consider how readers are positioned in and by magazine texts. There are several strategies which can be used to explore this. As Ballaster et al (1996:87) detail, there is the collective voice of a shared experience: publishers and readers are presented as a homogenous group, for example by the frequent use of pronouns like *you* and *us*. Another crucial strategy is the role the front cover of the magazine plays in positioning readers (McCracken, 1996:97). The image of a woman, the way she is presented in terms of makeup and clothes, together with the linguistic text that accompanies the image positions the reader ideologically. As I note, celebrities are often on the covers of these magazines and I discuss the idea that they function as role models in Chapter 6 (see below).

It is also relevant to consider how readers recognise themselves from what is written in the magazines, either identifying closely with whatever is being described, or, on the other hand, recognising themselves as different and distancing themselves from what they are reading. Here I draw on Mills (1995) who builds a multidisciplinary framework, with a foundation in stylistic theory, which includes a consideration of reader positioning and the relevance of gender in this context. Althusser (1971) is a key figure in her framework, and his theory of 'interpellation' or 'hailing' and the ways in which we recognise ourselves in texts that we

read or in the ways that we speak. The intertextual nature of the magazine texts (or any writing) is crucial to the understanding of recognition and of how we interpret what we read. We draw on our cultural frames of reference and there is consistent evidence for this, as I observe, in my analysis of both text and talk. Finally, I discuss the last, but very crucial strand involved in my framework: the concept of metonymy. Metonymy allows us to consider the possibility that the representations we come across in media texts are often highly selective. They provide only a partial picture of what is being described and drawn out, and as analysts we would be advised to consider what has been omitted in the selection. Metonymy describes the process whereby a part of something is substituted for the thing itself. The idea of selectivity is important because it becomes apparent that many of the terms and concepts described in the framework rely on metonymy, for example stereotyping and even 'myth' itself.

Chapter 5, the first analytical chapter, is a textual analysis of an article where I consider the cultural role of grandmother in Western societies. My analysis reveals that there is a new way in which to perform this role which allows the grandmother to fulfil which can only be termed an extension of parenthood by taking over the care of her grandchildren, and more than that, by taking sole responsibility for her grandchildren at times. But the new grandmother role is not only about taking care of her children's children: it is also framed within her own life, that of a busy adult who continues to contribute to society through her work (the grandmother may even have a high status occupation, as the three women who are the subjects of this article do). The grandmother is also portrayed as able to remain attractive through her older years and consequently retain a useful, valuable position for herself within society. This may be a different way of being a grandmother from the role that older women occupied in previous decades, and the fact that there are articles written about the new way to

be a grandmother (there are also books, or other manuals, such as one referred to in the article itself) suggests that the new grandmother role is not fully naturalised as yet. This fact is also drawn attention to explicitly by the description of the 'old' version of a grandmother, set out at the beginning of the article and available for the new grandmothers to draw upon in their interviews. It is an image which provides a dramatic contrast from the way the Yummy Grannies describe themselves.

The central focus of **Chapter 6** is on ageing celebrities, and their place as cultural role models, as they show non-celebrities (in other words, magazine readers) how to be, and what it is possible to achieve when we are older. Celebrities form an increasingly important and central place in our culture with entire industries and publications, both academic and popular, being devoted to their existence. There are magazines and other print publications which detail their lives, particularly in the private sphere; there are also television programmes and online material. Then there are academic books which deconstruct the phenomenon of celebrity, so the influence and interest is huge. The celebrity's lifestyle and way of being, with the emphasis on her personal rather than on her professional status, arguably has a major impact on many people's lives. We can then suggest, as I do in this chapter, that how celebrities age, and how they position themselves in relation to growing older (for example, how they conduct themselves in terms of their relationships, maintenance of their bodies and, crucially, how they continue to keep themselves employed as celebrities) impacts on the rest of us and what possibilities are consequently available to us as non-celebrities. What also became apparent was a somewhat mild, but albeit noticeable trace of resistance to the ideals of an ageist ideology. By that I mean that one celebrity in particular, Andie MacDowell, can be seen to be challenging the centrality of youth and young culture as synonymous with beauty and attractiveness and, moreover she questions the 'naturalness' of

older man/younger woman in on-screen relationships, drawing attention (as the articles concerned with relationships in Chapter 7 do) to the possibility of older woman/younger man as a positive and significant departure from previous norms.

Through the use of further textual analysis, **Chapter 7** explores another emerging way of being: the older woman and her relationships. I start the textual analysis in this chapter, however, by considering a problem page letter, involving an age gap relationship where the man is the older partner, but the woman has a problem. I do this to highlight the problematic concept of chronological ageing versus social ageing as almost 'universal' in the twenty first century, and one which can apply to men as well as to women. What is particularly interesting about the example I analyse is that the doubts and insecurities often experienced and expressed by older women in relation to their bodies are expressed by the young woman partner but are projected onto the man. This draws into sharp focus the chronological and biological aspects of ageing, but these are overlaid by their sociocultural meanings, that we decline as we age and lose our physical attractiveness as a result. As women we are aware of these changes and the social messages that accompany ageing, and through a young woman's eyes we see how older people are evaluated.

Thereafter, by concentrating on extracts from two articles which describe relationships between older women and younger men, I build upon the theme running through Chapter 5, which allows the older woman to be considered as still eligible and sexually attractive. Once again, the concept of an older woman/younger man relationship is not fully accepted, certainly not enough to pass without comment. This can be seen by the very fact that there are articles written in magazines and elsewhere about these aspects of life, but these ideas are

also drawn attention to within the articles themselves. There is a questioning in both of the articles about the meanings and motives behind such relationships: interestingly, perhaps, they have not been taken at 'face value', as simply indicating mutual attraction between two people. This is apparent in the fact that such relationships are being written about in the magazines, but also because 'reasons' are being offered as to what lies behind such relationships, although 'true love' is always somewhere in the mix.

Chapter 8 is the analysis of spoken texts rather than written or visual texts**.** It is in this chapter that I consider the words of older women themselves, by selecting salient extracts of my conversations with them over the course of twelve semi-structured interviews which took place over a period of around six months in the later part of 2007 and early 2008. What emerged from the data and its analysis was a consistent pattern of reaffirmation of the three central myths that I identified and outlined on page 2. But intertwined with this, a very contradictory element was also in operation, among some informants in particular. There was a 'resistance' to the Myth that ageing must be resisted as the 'natural' and 'right' thing to do. Some of the women I interviewed distanced themselves from the new 'positivity' that has become associated in recent times with older age groups, challenging the idea that external success, in the shape of, say, high profile occupations or cosmetic surgery, represent ideals to be aimed for uncritically by all older women. There was, however, another type of distancing strategy also present, although this manifested itself in the way some informants chose to discuss ageing with me in relation to themselves, as something they remained unconcerned over. It is possible that they wanted to convey to me that ageing did not affect them much either physically or mentally. But often there was a contradictory element in play, and my informants would sometimes (but not always) acknowledge this contradictory aspect in their thinking. At other times, the contradiction was apparent in the different ways

they (perhaps unconsciously) chose to talk about topics under discussion. The contradictions are, of course, part of the complex feelings and thoughts that most of us have about many aspects of our lives, including growing older. They are produced by and manifest themselves in the competing discourses we are all subject to. We deal with thoughts of ageing in a multitude of ways, perhaps embracing the new positive images of older age that abound, celebrating the increased opportunities available to us, while at the same time, rebelling against the 'rules' of ageing, as some of my informants did (for example, 'no miniskirts after forty'), or ridiculing the possibility of cosmetic surgery and distancing ourselves from those that have it.

Chapter 9 provides a summary of and conclusion to the major themes to come out of the analysis of both the primary data (the magazine texts) and of the interviews I conducted. I conclude that the theoretical concepts that I used to perform the analysis proved suitable and adaptable for the research project which is an investigation into the cultural constructions of age and ageing. Barthes's (1972) theories, in particular, the concept of myth are key in the understanding and interpretation of what is essentially popular culture (that is, the magazine data). Moreover, I have been able to apply his theories to the interview data as well. The use of Barthes's theories enabled me to identify three major myths connected to age and ageing and these are the myths that underpinned my analysis. Although these myths essentially provide the foundation stones for the thesis, it was also appropriate to draw upon and operationalise other theoretical concepts which I drew from the framework which I outline in Chapter 4.

Drawing on the key idea of selectivity, I have been able to show that the representations of ageing that we encounter rely on stereotyping and, in fact, age stereotypes are drawn upon explicitly in the article that was analysed for Chapter 5 on modern grandmother identities. Stereotypes are also implicitly drawn upon within the same chapter in connection with women and their relationship with small children. Stereotypes give readers an opportunity to evaluate themselves either positively or negatively in relation to what is defined and drawn out (see Perkins, 1996) and hence make judgements in this case in relation to themselves and the ageing process. Some modifications in behaviour may be necessary, either to become more like the stereotype if it is 'positive' or less like it if it is 'negative'.

In Chapter 9 I argue that the 'new' images associated with growing older in text, talk and visual images that I have analysed are not really 'positive' or empowering because they are based upon a set of values underpinned by the Myths of Ageing and the highly negative cultural associations that accompany chronological ageing. I point out also that some of my informants voiced this to be the case as well, being somewhat critical of the representations that they encountered in the magazines under study. Other informants, on the other hand, felt the messages being conveyed to be very positive, while a third group distanced themselves from both the representations and the ageing process in general. These seemingly contradictory readings and views only serve to highlight the contradictory feelings, thoughts and emotions that most women will have about their life course, what is happening to them and where they are headed for next.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

In this chapter I give a detailed account of the research that has taken place to date concerning age. I examine work that has been carried out within sociolinguistics itself, but I also detail work from other disciplines, most notably media and cultural studies as well as social theory and psychology. This is for a number of reasons. To begin with, there has been a paucity of work to date within sociolinguistics in this area. Moreover, work within other disciplines, which is often more developed, both complements and supports this study, particularly as this study deals primarily with media texts or what can be termed as popular culture.

I start by considering the fact that there has been a lack of academic work in the discipline of sociolinguistics, although there are a few notable exceptions, which will be detailed during the course of the review. Next, I consider that although there had also been a lack of work in other academic disciplines until recently, age is now considerably more developed as a topic and as a relation of difference within, for example, Cultural Studies, and this development has occurred during the last fifteen years.

I move on to discuss work that has been carried out based on the observation that age can be conceptualised as a social construction rather than simply as a biological fact. I highlight several seminal studies which argue this to be the case. I also consider the work of Hockey & James (1993) who discuss, inter alia, the process of infantalization (treating older adults as if they were children) and how this process is underpinned by a repertoire of figurative

language, including metaphor and metonymy. This section leads on to the work that has been undertaken on age at the Centre for Language and Communication Research, Cardiff University, and I follow this with a brief discussion of age in relation to gender. Here, I also examine the new field of Age Studies, and in particular the work of Margaret Gullette (1997, 2004).

The final sections highlight the role of women's magazines as a source of identity information for women (see, for example, Johnston & Swanson, 2003a&b) together with some facts and observations about the particular magazines involved in this study.

'<u>Sociolinguistics' underdeveloped dimension</u>'

Although a body of work exists in connection with several scholars at the Centre for Language and Communication Research, Cardiff University, most notably Nikolas Coupland, Justine Coupland, Angie Williams and Virpi Ylänne, their work is in the minority. Indeed, Nikolas Coupland (2001:185) has referred to age as: '. . . sociolinguistics' under-developed dimension'. As he points out, other than in relation to language change, research into language and 'age' and sociolinguistic research on older people in particular, is noticeable by its absence. Drawing on Eckert (1997), Coupland N (2001:187) argues that within sociolinguistics, where age does get a mention, work has been based within a very narrow theoretical framework, one which sees age as little more than a guide to 'graduated linguistic change' (ibid:187), a framework that ignores social theory which has conceptualised ageing in a more interesting, many-faceted way. As Eckert (1997) reiterates, much of the work in

the field of linguistics has concentrated on age-gradable features of language or linguistic change that can be determined by apparent or real time studies.

This observation extends to introductory books on sociolinguistics for beginning undergraduates which is arguably an important consideration as topics traditionally handled within these textbooks may well sow the seeds for students' research projects later on in their career. For example, although Holmes (2001), in an introductory text, discusses language and age, she concentrates on age-graded features of speech (such as slang and non-standard speech). She also notes the confusion that can sometimes occur in those researching language as to whether a particular pattern is an example of age-grading or linguistic change. What Holmes does not touch upon are societal attitudes, perceptions and their resulting social consequences. The resulting social consequences, both linguistic and otherwise, are usually dealt with in connection with studies of other topics which relate to social difference, such as race or gender.

There is a notable exception to this in a chapter in an introductory textbook by Peccei (2004) where it is evident that age is handled somewhat differently from simply a consideration of age-grading or language change. To begin with, then, I start by highlighting some of the issues Peccei's chapter raises. It is an introductory text, but nevertheless worthy of consideration, because it draws attention to the topic of age for students of sociolinguistics.

Peccei's (2004) chapter opens with examples of language variation in the interactions of several age groups. Her chapter, however, concentrates on language at the two ends of the

lifespan: those under 5 and those over 65. By doing this, she is able to show how these two groups are set apart from the 'middle segment' (2004:117) which is reflected in their 'special status' (ibid:117) in society, economically and legally and also in the societal attitudes directed towards them. Peccei gives examples of the names used to refer to members of these two groups, often negative (for example, 'minor', 'pensioner'), which are indicative of their relative powerlessness in Western societies. By drawing attention to how few names there are to describe those who are neither very young nor very old, she shows how adulthood operates as the 'unmarked' category, the one that is 'normal' and unnoticed.

She also demonstrates the similarities between Child Directed Language (CDL) and Elder Directed Language (EDL): the language used by the 'middle segment' in communication with members of the other two groups. CDL is characterised by, inter alia, its simplified structure, repetitiveness, increased use of questions, slower speed, distinctive pronunciation and exaggerated intonation (2004:125). There is a discussion as to whether this type of speech modification is a necessary tool with which to interact with these two groups, or whether it is simply indicative of the power dynamics involved, that is, whether it is a strategy with which to exercise control.

Thus, Peccei's chapter draws attention to the social consequences of language and age, discussing age as a relation of difference, in much the same way as gender and ethnicity. This raises the question as to why age viewed from the same perspective is missing from books such as Holmes (2001). There may be a number of reasons why this is the case; Nikolas Coupland suggests in particular 'gerontophobia' (2001:186), the fear, the implications and the consequent repression of thoughts of age. In other words, people avoid

activities (and this might include research) which involve them having to face their own mortality. Western societies generally fear death because it is conceived of as a process which ends the life course rather than being a part of it (Wolf, 1998). Old age is thus seen as representing death. For the most part, there has been an inability thus far within sociolinguistics to conceptualise age outside of these parameters, in other words an inability to conceptualise age as anything other than a biological process.

In other academic disciplines, too, some scholars have tried to account for the lack of work that had been done until recently on ageing. Reasons for the apparent inability to consider age as a social rather than simply a biological process within linguistics may be similar to those put forward by Woodward (1999), who attempted to account for the lack of work within cultural studies at the time she was writing. As she points out, while race and gender, the other two prominent markers of social difference in Western society, have been studied extensively, studies of age remain in the minority. This is remarkable, because age is the one 'difference' that is common to us all (Woodward, 1999:x). She suggests that our society as a whole denies old age: the term 'ageism' (coined by Butler, 1969) has been used to describe our prejudice about this time of life. Moreover, as Woodward points out, undergraduate student populations are generally young and may thus perceive the topic as irrelevant to them.

Woodward was writing as a cultural theorist, towards the end of the 1990s. It is, however, noticeable, as this literature review will make evident, that within cultural studies there has been considerably *more* work, mainly theoretically-driven, on the body in general and on the topic of age and ageing compared with what has taken place within sociolinguistics. Indeed,

throughout the 1990s, age and the body have been increasingly theorised within cultural studies. It may be, therefore, that sociolinguistics is still catching up with what is already occurring in other disciplines.

At this point, it may also be worth considering why in academic research in recent years, there has been more interest in the body generally and also more interest in how ageing is constructed. Some of those scholars who have researched the social construction of ageing have made the observation that it is because they realise that they are getting older themselves and they are bringing their own awareness into the equation. As Featherstone & Wernick (1995:13) remind us in their edited collection, within the discipline of the human sciences, '…the subject of knowledge is never wholly outside the object it seeks to understand'. The editors refer to the authors of the individual chapters in this collection as 'Greying baby-boomers…' (ibid:13). So who are the baby-boomers?

The baby-boomers: defining a cohort

The baby-boomers are a large age cohort who have now all reached middle-age. There is the suggestion that the changing demographic profiles of Western societies (that is, there is a higher proportion of older people in these societies than used to be the case) together with the economic power of this group may alter negative societal attitudes towards older groups. Indeed, there is evidence that this is already happening in the marketing strategies of many corporations (Peccei, ibid:123; see also Sawchunk, 1995; Weiss, 2002).

Huber & Skidmore (2003) define the baby-boomers as:

- those born between 1945-1964. In the post war years, the birth-rate in Western societies increased dramatically;
- the generation that have always lived within a consumer culture;
- considerably well-off (as a group) compared with the generations that come both before and after them.

It is said that the baby-boomers are refusing to become old, and define themselves as 'forever young' (Featherstone & Wernick, 1995:13). It could be argued, therefore, that more interest and academic research has taken place in recent times on the topic of ageing because of the power, characteristics and sheer numbers of ageing baby-boomers (some of whom are researchers themselves).

However, in relation to the body generally (rather than to ageing specifically), Justine Coupland & Gwyn (2003:7) have noted that while the body has indeed been theorised, there remains little application of theory to practice, using data such as talk, text and semiotic analysis. More specifically, with regard to ageing, but without citing the communications disciplines in particular, the psychologist Linda Wolf (1998) has made a similar point, drawing attention to the fact that there are theories about the ageing process, but these overshadow empirical research. One of the major motivations of this study, then, is to redress the balance and attempt to link current social theory to practice, drawing on the theoretical work that has been carried out on ageing and applying it to contemporary texts.

Ageing: from biological fact to social construction

It cannot be denied that ageing is a biological process. As Featherstone & Wernick (1995:1) remark in the introduction to their edited collection, humans have a limited lifespan: 'We are born, we live, we die'. What can be argued against is that ageing is rooted solely in biology. Hareven (1995:121) observes that, although age and ageing are connected to biology, '…their meanings are socially and culturally determined'. As she (ibid:123) and others have detailed, life stages such as childhood, adolescence and adulthood became increasingly more defined during the 20th century. For example, childhood, as an age category, came into being in the early part of the 19th century, along with the emergence of the middle classes and more emphasis on the couple as a unit rather than on the extended family. However, there was no clear demarcation between stages of adulthood until a need arose to differentiate between 'middle' and 'old' age, for example, by the introduction of a compulsory retirement age. Unlike adolescence, which can be characterised by the physical changes of puberty, Hareven (ibid) contends that the sociocultural meanings linked to adulthood are less clearly defined.

This lack of definition allows, perhaps, for a shift in boundaries, precisely what cultural theorists such as Featherstone & Hepworth (1991) have drawn attention to as a feature of postmodern society. They argue (ibid:372), that postmodernity has led to a 'de-institutionalisation and de-differentiation' in age stages and a blurring of the distinct categories which had emerged in the previous two centuries. Drawing on Meyrowitz (1985), they point out that there are, currently, many similarities in activities, dress and behaviour across the life-span, tending towards what Meyrowitz (1985:249) has termed as a 'uni-age behavioural style'. Moreover, there has been a resistance to the category of 'middle-age', which is currently often referred to as the 'mid-life' and which seems to encompass a wide

age span chronologically, roughly from 35 to 60 and perhaps beyond (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991:373).

The activities and attitudes linked with age which have been considered thus far are connected to, but do not describe fully, a related idea, which is that individuals, particularly from the 'mid-life' onwards, often consider themselves 'young' even though they look 'old'. In the seminal chapter entitled *The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course*, Featherstone & Hepworth (1991) outline the concept of the 'Mask' which, broadly speaking, details the 'split' between the age the older individual feels and considers her/himself to be and what they see in the mirror, which is how others perceive them. Featherstone & Hepworth (ibid) go on to detail the case of Pat Moore (see Young, 1989), a young gerontology student from New York who, made up professionally, lived for three years as a much older person. Eventually, the strain of living a dual existence, together with the conflict caused by the knowledge that this was not her real self, precipitated a breakdown. Moore was subjected to much negative behaviour from others during the time of her disguise. She also took some older people into her confidence and it became evident that they, too, experienced a split between their outer appearance and their inner 'youthful' selves (see Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991; Young, 1989). The idea of a 'mask' is one that is frequently alluded to by older people as a way of describing the process of exterior ageing which is problematic, while what goes on inside represents the true self (Featherstone & Hepworth, op.cit:379).

The concept of the 'mask' functions as further support to the idea that the boundaries between age categories are indeed being eroded (op.cit:383), at least in terms of how people see themselves and the activities that they enjoy. Moreover, at the time of writing their

chapter (late 1980s), Featherstone & Hepworth state that there is evidence to suggest that for some (usually the middle-classes), who are middle-aged (or at the 'mid-life') things are starting to change: '…a new language of ageing with a much greater expressive range has been gradually emerging' (1991:383). Written more than 15 years ago, these scholars' observations are clearly relevant still to the publications (women's magazines) that are being analysed within this study. Furthermore, reference to the fact that attitudes and expectations are changing is constantly made. An obvious example of this is the slogan or catch phrase for *Woman & Home*, one of the magazines under study: written on the spine of every issue during the period under study was the phrase 'A Brand New Attitude' which signals that something different is happening from what has gone on before.

The idea of a 'mask', or the acceptance that there is very often a split is not, however, without its critics. For example, as a result of her research in 1991 into the life histories of politically-active older people, Andrews (1999) has argued that the concept of the mask, although seductive, is instrumental in denying older people something that is inherently part of themselves: their experience. This aspect was fundamentally important to them, because they were able to acknowledge how they had changed and grown through time: it added value to what they had become. As she points out, the importance and emphasis placed upon youth in our culture makes it very difficult for Western societies to see any value in age.

In these societies (and in America in particular), there is a concentration upon a youth culture which is foregrounded in media texts, the arts and advertising. The older person, by contrast, receives far less attention or is often viewed negatively (Wolf, 1998). Those who identify with their appearance and, in particular, a youthful appearance will lose confidence in

themselves as they grow older (Wolf, ibid). By contrast, it seems that Andrews's respondents' sense of themselves was constructed around their political lives, rather than around their physical appearance. While it may be true that the older people Andrews interviewed placed high value on the duration, experience and knowledge of their political life, one has to also remember the context in which Andrews was asking the questions. In other words, if the focus of the research had been different, perhaps there would have been less of an emphasis on the positive aspects of her respondents' experience of ageing.

Andrews (1999; 2000) has been strongly critical of the so-called 'positive' redefinitions of ageing, some of which I will discuss in the analytical chapters of this thesis. Interestingly, this type of criticism is something which was voiced to an extent by some of my interview informants and, in Chapter 8, I discuss this as a type of resistance, particularly to 'age resistant' practices. However, it is precisely because the life-span in Western societies is increasing that it is now possible to 'allow' such a redefinition of what it means to be older and to push the boundaries of who and what behaviour defines the 'old-old', the category which one wants to avoid being placed in for as long as possible. But Andrews (1999) has argued that the so-called 'redefinition' of age and age-resistance practices both contribute to and reinforce societal ageism.

Andrews (2000:792) has drawn attention to the actor, Demi Moore and suggested that by appearing nude when heavily pregnant on the cover of Vanity Fair in 1991, Moore helped to 'rehabilitate' the body image of pregnant women. Perhaps Andrews was implying that, in so doing, Moore was instrumental in promoting the idea that pregnancy was a 'desirable' condition, in several senses, and that pregnancy does not necessitate a withdrawal or mark the

ending of a woman as a sexual being. In terms of rehabilitation, Andrews (ibid:794) asks: 'Is it the ageing body's turn next?' It is possible that Andrews is right: to a certain extent there is a rehabilitation of body image connected with older age groups already occurring, and these are the representations we are seeing within the pages of the women's magazines discussed within this thesis. For example, the women who appear on the front covers of magazines aimed at the 35+ age group are almost always older celebrities as I detail in subsequent chapters. Andrews would prefer, I suggest, to see this type of 'rehabilitation', that of images of ageing, rather than the elimination of words such as 'elderly' or of the concept of 'old age' which Bytheway (1995) suggests. This leads on to the concept of 'age resistance' and the forms that it takes.

Age resistance and Ageism

'Age resistance' might be defined as the processes and means by which individuals and/or groups adopt strategies to resist age and ageing. 'Age resistance', as a desired objective, is commonly referred to on the front cover of magazines, in magazine articles, and in advertisements for skincare products in particular. In almost every issue the words 'age' or 'ageing' appear with 'resist' or 'resistance' or, alternatively, there is the phrase 'anti-ageing' which suggests that it is 'normal', 'obvious' and 'common sense' to want to fight age. 'Age resistance' necessitates engaging in strategies in order to avoid being classed as 'old' or associated with 'older people'.

'Ageism', on the other hand, describes the discrimination that is expressed towards older people because of their age. The term was coined by Robert Butler in the 1960s as a result of

a controversy in which he was involved concerning a proposed high-rise block of flats for elderly people in a fashionable part of Maryland, USA. Middle-aged residents who already lived there thought that the facilities (swimming pool, air conditioning, parking) should not be made available to the newcomers, who, it was proposed, would have no use for them. The newcomers were viewed as an unsettling force (Bytheway, 1995:30). Ageism was subsequently defined as follows:

> Ageism can be seen as a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin colour and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills…Ageism allows the younger generation to see older people as different from themselves, thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings (Butler & Lewis, 1973, quoted in Bytheway, 1995:30).

In postmodern society 'age resistance' takes many forms, the most obvious of which are cosmetic surgery, diet, exercise, clothing and attitudes. Although 'age resistance' and 'ageism' do not describe exactly the same thing, they are inextricably linked. Both involve distaste for all that is culturally associated with becoming old, particularly markers of bodily decline and both may involve keeping a physical as well as a mental distance from the 'old'. Age resistance can only exist, therefore, as both a concept and a strategy in a culturally ageist society where to be considered 'old' is viewed with extreme negativity. Negative perceptions about the ageing process, and how these perceptions are embodied in the use of metaphorical concepts is detailed next.

Ageing: infantalization and figurative language

Hockey & James (1993), two social anthropologists, have studied extensively how dependency and independence are conceptualised at different stages in what they term the 'life course' (1993:1). The term 'life course' rather than 'life cycle' is used because, they argue, there is increasing variability in the way in which individuals pass through life, as new age categories emerge in response to shifting demographic (and hence shifting social) patterns in Western societies. Hockey's work involved 'growing old', while James's work was concerned with 'growing up'.

Working together, they considered the parallels that had come to light in their respective field work, that is, the similarities in experiences of being either very young or very old. In particular, they concentrated on the socialisation of children in the familial setting, compared to the care situation in residential homes for the elderly. As they point out, personhood is denied to both the elderly and the very young in ways that are very similar, ways that are marked out by control and management within each setting. Drawing heavily on Lakoff & Johnson (1980), they highlight what they refer to as 'metaphoric linkage' (1993:3), where old age is conceptualised in terms of childhood, a point which is not new, but which had not, up to now, been theorized. There is the possibility, for example, that infantilization (treating older adults as if they were children) is a way the taboo of death is dealt with by both the elderly and their carers. In addition, the similarities in the way both groups are treated can be conceptualised metaphorically, by people's behaviour and by their social practices, including some of the language which is used to describe older adults. Infantilization in Western societies is culturally specific, unnoticed behaviour, but it is not universal to all societies. Indeed, Hockey & James believe that, even in Western societies, the position of relative

powerlessness of older adults is shifting in response to changing demographics and a consequent change in social reality. This belief, which has been remarked upon by other cultural theorists (for example, Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991) extends to my own work, because it is evident, particularly in the monthly magazines I study, that continuing power and status (both sexual and economic) is demonstrated as important (indeed, crucial) and possible for the older woman and hence she is able to continue to claim membership of the independent adult group.

Hockey and James argue that infantilization practices are grounded in a repertoire of figurative language, most notably metaphor and metonymy, which contribute towards marking out asymmetrical relationships between the young, the old and independent adults. Childhood is used to metaphorically describe old age and dependency in Western cultures. For example, when older adults become confused and perhaps disorientated, they are referred to as being in a 'second childhood' (1993:9) and suffer a loss in status as a result. Moreover, using metonymic terms such as 'wrinkly' to describe an older person or by referring to a 90 year old as a 'girl' trivialises and weakens the status of older adults in Western society. Infantilization is also realised through metonymy. For example, incontinence or speech difficulties often become defining characteristics for a person (1993:98). In addition, infantlization also involves seeing sexual behaviour as inappropriate in the same way as it is for a child. In the magazines I studied, however, it became apparent that there is a continued emphasis for an older woman on remaining 'sexy' well into the later years (the word is foregrounded in many texts) although this is tied into the idea that she must, at the same time, adopt strategies of age-resistance: that is, she must look and seem as young as possible. In other words 'sexy' involves effort: buying products and clothes; spending time on appearance, diet and exercise and (possibly) money on surgery. Gott (2005:2) refers to this

as a ‘new myth of the ‘sexy oldie’’. Fundamentally, therefore, as she points out, it involves the older person defining themselves according to a youthful model, a model which is presented as the older person’s duty to adhere to in order to gain an extension of membership of the life stage known as middle age. Figurative language, especially metonymy, is an important guiding principle within my own study, where I emphasise the idea that systems or ways of thinking about older age are overcoded onto a representative symbol or idea. Moreover, metonymy is used to define typical identifiable stereotypes, both positive and negative.

It has been worth exploring Hockey & James’s (1993) work in some detail. If, as Lakoff & Johnson (1980:3) suggest, the way we think and act is governed by metaphor because our conceptual system itself is mainly metaphorical, then one has a starting point from which to understand the social construction, rather than the biological process, of ageing in Western cultures (Hockey & James, 1993:33). And if, as Hockey & James observe, it is infantilizing practices that form the basis of the social construction of ageing, because they allow us to draw on concepts of childhood to form a basis for our practices in relation to older adults, then this has repercussions for how older adults (in this study, the 35+ group) conceptualise themselves. Older adults define themselves by drawing on metaphors and metonyms, which allow them to distance themselves from the ways in which the elderly are conceptualised. This becomes evident many times within the central chapters of this thesis as I will show. If old age is represented by drawing on metaphors and metonyms of childhood and dependency (despite the fact that many older adults are not dependent), then one of the major functions of the magazine texts analysed in this thesis is to counter this by stressing independence, financial as well as physical, as a distancing strategy from this type of construct of old age. Magazines do this explicitly at times, by their language choices and their visual

representations, as I shall demonstrate, particularly in Chapter 5, which analyses modern grandmother identities. Next, then, I turn to give consideration to some of the work that has been carried out within Sociolinguistics.

Work within Sociolinguistics

I have outlined Nikolas Coupland's (2001) concerns relating to the lack of work within sociolinguistics. His points are reiterated in another chapter authored by himself and Ylänne-McEwen (2006). To begin with, these scholars detail the conceptualisation of ageing within sociolinguistics, for example, that the discipline has concentrated on childhood language development, viewing adulthood as a type of unmarked category. Coupland N & Ylänne - McEwen (ibid) go on to detail how age has hitherto been researched (citing the concentration on age graded features of language). They are critical of the narrowness of the models of ageing within sociolinguistics and point to the lack of attention given to ageing's cultural, rather than its biological effects. Sociolinguistics is deficient compared to some other academic disciplines (such as Cultural Studies) which have been quicker to acknowledge the effect of changing demographics or the merging of lifestyles across the generations. Coupland N & Ylänne-McEwen (ibid) stress the priority which needs to be given to research into the social implications of the ageing process.

Their chapter continues with an outline of what is referred to as 'patronising talk' (ibid:2535), or the type of interaction that often takes place within institutional settings such as care homes where younger adults will over accommodate when talking to older people in line with existing stereotypes of older age which encompass dependency and incompetence. The

authors then move on to consider discourse analytic studies, reviewing work that has been conducted in this field, including some of those which I outline below. Coupland N & Ylänne-McEwen (2006) conclude, by drawing on Butler (1969), and 'ageism', the term he coined. This describes the prejudice faced by older age groups, including the negative social effects such as social exclusion which makes a strong case for ageing to be studied further.

In the early 1990s the Couplands, together, separately and with others, conducted a number of studies which investigated how age is talked about, how older people talk about themselves and how different generations interact with one another (see, for example, Coupland N et al, 1991; Coupland N & Nussbaum, 1993). More recently, and exploring similar themes, Coupland J & Williams (1997) conducted a discursive analysis of Generation X (the generation born in the years 1964-1980), focusing on the way they define themselves in relation to their parents' generation (the so-called baby-boomers) and other generational groups. The research took place in the US and involved a series of focus groups. The researchers were interested in the way in which this generation interacted with the media images that portrayed them and how far they were prepared to accept commonality with their generational group. Although some aspects of my own research will be quite different, these two themes are relevant to the proposed study. What is particularly evident in my own research is how magazines define and draw out identities for older women, although these identities are very often based on a set of characteristics and values associated with younger age groups, albeit with some modifications. Moreover, in Chapter 8, where I discuss the data obtained from my interview informants, I examine how they define or position themselves as mid-life women.

The way people talk about ageing is discussed by Jaworski (2003) who analyses interviews that took place as part of a BBC television series in 1998, called 'Naked'. The series dealt with people's feelings, reactions to and anxieties about different parts of the lifespan. As he points out, the fact that the series was divided into four parts, each dealing very approximately with different age groups (teens, young adults, middle-age and older adults) demonstrates that the programme director considered age to be a highly relevant marker in people's lives.

Jaworski (ibid) analyses the way people talked about themselves, noting that, for the middle-aged interviewees, chronological age seemed to be less relevant in terms of their self-identification. What was more important was how they felt and looked. For example, an informant in his forties, using the words of a pop singer, describes himself as 'eighteen till I die' and as 'maturing' (2003:115). Drawing on Coupland J's (2000) study of over-50's dating advertisements (see below), Jaworski points out how 'maturing' can be a euphemism for getting older. Jaworski also links the informants' self-identification with Featherstone & Hepworth's comments of a merging of age boundaries (1991:372). Moreover, by linking one's self-identity with older pop stars who remain not only successful but closely connected with youth culture, there is further evidence that the interviewee remains young, at least on the inside.

Drawing on the comments of a 70-year old's attitudes towards growing older, Jaworski (2003:155) shows that the interviewee was keen to distance herself from the 'dominant stereotype' of being older. As he points out, the two interviewees referred to here invoke the late teens/early twenties as a reference point to how they perceived themselves to be on the

inside (that is, still youthful). It may be (as Jaworski suggests) that late teens/early twenties represents the 'norm' for these interviewees, while older age is seen as a 'deviation'. Jaworski also points to the 'problems' referred to by the interviewees as they become middle-aged. Strategies to deal with these problems involve age resistance, keeping fit, having cosmetic surgery, all of which are regarded as legitimate ways to avoid the ageing process. Here Jaworski demonstrates how discourses of advertising become intermeshed with the responses of the interviewees and how being sexually attractive is perceived to be critical in terms of self-evaluation and self-acceptance.

'Lay' discourses are, according to Jaworski, often informed by more 'expert' ones. For example, interviewees would draw on the expert to provide an explanation and justification for the physical changes (perhaps loss of muscle tone) connected to the ageing process. What this suggests, although Jaworski does not discuss this, is that the 'expert' (often medical) explanation provides not only a validation for the experience of the individual, but may also shape that experience. Moreover, as he does point out, 'solutions', or at least strategies to deal with ageing, are often themselves couched in 'scientific' or 'medical' terms and, certainly, what was often evident in the texts I analysed: there is an emphasis on keeping fit, active and healthy.

Moving on from spoken material to an analysis of written material, Coupland J (2000) carried out a study into the language of over-50s dating advertisements in magazines and newspapers, focusing on how individuals defined themselves and, in common with dating advertisements generally, sought to represent themselves favourably to others, sometimes by distancing themselves from the "old old". To a certain extent this strategy is also adopted in

the magazines I studied. As I note in a later chapter, 'old' is never used to describe the readership. More favourable and euphemistic terms such as 'grown up' or 'mature' are often used.

In the same issue of the *Journal of Communication*, Ylänne-McEwen (2000) details her study of holiday companies selling holidays as lifestyle to the over-50s. The study involved looking at how holidays were presented in the brochures and the way in which travel agency staff managed potential clients' enquiries/bookings (what Ylänne-McEwen refers to as 'travel agency discourse', 2000:97). This involves denying ageing, in the sense that explicit reference to older age is avoided. What ageing might involve physically is only referred to implicitly, for example, by specifying the number of stairs that have to be climbed. This explicit denial of ageing is a phenomenon which she notes is not unique to the tourist industry, but one which occurs regularly in postmodern society. Drawing on Blaikie (1999), Ylänne-McEwen refers to the new models of older adulthood circulating within our society at the present time, which are precisely the areas considered in this research study. Ylänne-McEwen's work builds on her earlier research in 1999 when she analysed the discourses of age identity in travel agency interaction between older clients and staff.

In addition, and also within the field of sociolinguistics, I refer to two additional studies by Justine Coupland. The first is an article written with Williams (2002) in which they use a discursive and semiotic framework to analyse what they describe as conflicting discourses concerning the menopause. They look at pharmaceutical texts, 'alternative' therapy texts and feminist texts, identifying various metaphors that are used to construct the menopause (for example, it can be described in terms of deficiency, loss, degeneration). They also point to

the scientific discourse associated particularly with the pharmaceutical texts, which help to legitimate what was written in these texts. The researchers also draw attention to the constraints on women in the ways that they are able to talk about and share their experiences, as this time of life is often viewed very negatively. Media resources, such as those considered in this study, could, they suggest, play a vital role in assisting women to view this period as positive rather than negative. The essence of this work is very relevant for my own study because getting older is often written or talked about in quite negative terms: 'dreading old age' or the idea that one can potentially lose one's beauty as one ages are two examples that I discuss within the central chapters. It is arguable whether the 'new positivity' which has become associated with older age groups in recent times (see Gott, 2005:23) and which is very evident within some sections of the magazines I study is actually positive at all. Perhaps it is more the case that older age can be viewed positively but only if one continues to subscribe to youthful values. Once again, this point is discussed more fully within the central chapters.

The second of Justine Coupland's studies (2003) concerns the discourses of skincare marketing in the proliferation of advertisements which adorn the pages of women's magazines today. Using pragmatic principles, semiotics and some tools from Critical Discourse Analysis, she draws attention to the ways in which ageing is socially constructed in these texts, a point which relates directly to my own work. While my study does not concentrate on advertisements, many of the articles in women's magazines use similar strategies themselves and, in so doing, are able to reinforce and promote the products in the surrounding advertisements. Advertisements are an important component in determining the character of women's magazines (and hence the readership) not least because of the revenue that they provide, which in itself allows the magazine to remain viable (Winship, 1987).

In her analysis of the skincare advertisements, Justine Coupland (ibid) demonstrates that societal norms and behaviour dictate that women, in particular, will not wish to appear to be ageing and must therefore engage in bodywork and other procedures to deny what is essentially a biological fact. Coupland points to particular lexical items such as 'repair' and 'correction' which operate figuratively, indicating that work is required to make something or someone serviceable. As she points out, these 'norms' apply specifically to women because they are judged more harshly than men on their appearance. This is an observation which is drawn attention to in Sontag's (1978) work which will be considered after I give a brief summary of further work carried out at Cardiff University by Williams et al (2007).

The paper details the work that has been carried out over a seven year period into the advertisements produced as part of a campaign for a product, Olivio margarine. Older people are the main characters in the campaign, both because they are the images in the advertisements and also because they are those who are being targeted by the advertisers. It is worth pointing out, however, that younger consumers responded by buying the product more than older consumers did (Williams et al, 2007:6). There are some similarities in the work and analysis of these advertisements and my own study because they both focus on the concept of stereotyping and make use of, inter alia, concepts and tools from semiotic theory to assist in the analysis. I have, however, made use of a somewhat different theoretical framework within my own work, focussing more explicitly on the work of Roland Barthes (1972, 1977) as I detail in Chapter 4, whereas Williams et al (2007) make use of Kress & Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic model.

As might be expected, in the promotion of a product of this type, the advertisements analysed focus on supposedly positive attributes that can be associated with a healthy (Mediterranean) lifestyle, such as longevity and being fit and healthy and (crucially, as I see it) engaging with life. The researchers point out that while the first phase of the campaign drew mainly on stereotypical representations of older people, as the campaign progressed, the images included more active and sometimes sexualised representations of older age. While the authors conclude that the later representations were mostly positive, what I would question is whether the images or representations are indeed 'positive' or are simply redefining a culturally very negative experience into one that could be positive by promoting exactly the same values associated with younger age groups.

Williams et al (2007) suggest that the types of images they found in the advertisements may present consumers with possibilities for older age that are not associated with the more traditional stereotypes currently in circulation. They admit, however, that they have not yet carried out audience response studies to support this. My own research, (although it is a much smaller study) includes an audience response component in the form of interviews. One of the results of this suggests that the 'new', more 'positive' images of ageing that we are encountering in media texts (such as magazines and advertisements) can, in some cases, be anxiety provoking, particularly for women. Indeed, it has been argued that the ageing process affects women more than it does men and it is this that I consider next.

Ageing and gender

In a widely-cited chapter, *The double standard of ageing*, Sontag (1978) argues that ageing has double standards because it affects women more negatively. This is because the defining characteristics of what it is to be 'masculine' or what it is to be 'feminine' are different.

Physical beauty is presented as more important for a woman. Moreover, beauty is associated with women of a younger age in Western societies. Definitions of 'masculinity' on the other hand depend on qualities (for example, competence, self-assertiveness) which are not eroded, and in fact, are often improved by age. As a result, women are considered sexually ineligible much earlier than men because their eligibility is reliant upon their looks, as well as their fertility. Men, on the other hand, who may not have experienced such a decline in those features and attributes which define them, remain able to attract women often much younger than they are, despite their advancing years. The concept of physical beauty and attractiveness is a recurrent theme heavily foregrounded in women's magazines and consequently within the texts I analyse. The concept continues to be promoted as relevant and crucial for the older women and revolves around the often implicit ideal of remaining attractive to men, and this will become evident during the course of this thesis.

Although I have drawn attention to Sontag's (1978) argument that ageing affects women more negatively than it does men, it is too simplistic to assume that men are never affected, particularly in this particular historical moment. There is increasing evidence to suggest age discrimination touches men who are also under pressure to look younger, an issue discussed in some detail by Gullette (2004), among others (I shall explore the work of Gullette in the next section). There are, for example, increasing numbers of men seeking cosmetic surgery solutions (see Weiss, 2002). Notwithstanding these trends, theory, research and evidence suggests women are more powerfully affected, and indeed negatively so, by societal resistance to concepts of ageing. Sontag's article may have been written some thirty years ago, but many of the issues she raises remain the same today.

Taking on board, then, the observations of Sontag and those expressed in Coupland J's (2003) study, that age has been, and perhaps continues to be, a gendered issue with the odds stacked heavily against the ageing woman in terms of attracting a (male) partner and in terms of life chances generally, one can legitimately draw attention to the gendered nature of social ageing. What has also to be acknowledged, however, is that it is increasingly the case that many men are subject to similar pressures.

Age theory and age studies: Margaret Gullette

Western societies foster a 'master narrative' of ageing as a biological process of decline (Hepworth, 2003:89). Furthermore, what is often now termed the 'mid-life' (middle age) can be defined as a time when an awareness of our own mortality hits us (Hepworth, 1999:140). Social constructionist theories argue that although getting older is clearly accompanied by biological changes in the body, the implications of these changes are overshadowed by the social and cultural effects and consequently the ways in which we interpret these effects are through the discourses of ageing (Hepworth, 2003:90), which I will argue convey the Myths of Ageing.

Margaret Gullette (1997, 2004) is prominently critical of the way in which ageing is conceived of in Western societies as a downward spiral of decay. It is taken for granted that a decay occurs to all adults and has to be faced once one becomes middle aged. Her ground-breaking, innovative perspective on the social and cultural construction of ageing as a decline scenario provides a cornerstone for this study. Gullette (1997:9) refers to the 'decline narrative'. This describes the way in which people view and articulate the midlife and

beyond as a process of decline. She challenges the ideologies upon which such beliefs are founded, insisting that none of those beliefs are 'natural', but are socially and culturally constructed. For Gullette 'middle ageism' consists of stereotypical meanings about a particular time when one recognises that one is no longer young. This involves the promotion of particular clothes, foods and supplements, medical clinics, surgical procedures and attitudes towards sex, children and death. It also involves a series of dysphemistic metaphors (for example, 'over the hill', 'deadwood', 'technophobe') which provide justification for the loss of status, both economically and personally, that many individuals experience around this time.

The foundation stone for what Gullette (2004) terms Age Studies is that age and getting older may be a biological fact but it is also a cultural fact. Age Studies is about 'prioritizing culture' because the overriding feature of Age Studies is that ageing is cultural rather than biomedical (Gullette, 2004:101). As Gullette puts it:

> The basic idea we need to absorb is that whatever happens in the body, human beings are aged by culture first of all. This is social constructionism. Everything we know of as culture in the broadest sense – discourses, feelings, practices, institutions, material conditions – is saturated with concepts of age and aging (1997:3)

Feminist Age Studies is concerned with putting older age and, indeed, any other age, 'within the continuum of particularized life courses' (2005:1). Gullette (2005) argues that Feminist Age Studies is a move towards building age into theory, as well as into research, politics and practice. Its overriding concern is that we are being aged by culture. There is, for example, a gendered socialisation of children into an acceptance of cultural ageing and the power issues

associated with that. These points are demonstrated in Itzin's (1986) study, a content analysis of *Woman* magazine over a six month period, which is discussed later in this Chapter and also in Chapter 4.

Age is as powerful a 'difference' as those (such as gender, social class, disability and religion) that have hitherto been considered relevant for study within the Academy. Age ideology is another 'body based' way of classifying people, and like gender and race, is also discriminatory. Age discriminates because there are resources and opportunities available to those that are younger which can be denied when one is older. This might include jobs and status or the freedom to wear, or feel comfortable wearing, certain styles of clothing or acting in particular (age appropriate) ways.

Gullette distinguishes between the biological process of getting older and what may happen in the body, and the social process based on the 'decline narrative'. She terms the 'midlife' a 'cultural fiction' (1997:3). While ageism has existed for a long time, middle-ageism is specific to recent times, brought about by a 'midlife discourse' which evolved in the 1970s in response to the baby boomer generation (those born between 1945 and 1964), who were starting to become 'old' and, in some ways, resisting some of the cultural constructions associated with growing older. Gullette argues that the discourse is, in fact, also aimed at those born prior to 1945 or after 1964, that is, those who are not considered to be part of the baby boomer generation. We are all subject to the influence of cultural constructions of ageing, no matter what our age.

Moreover, Age Studies (which was conceived only in 1993) is not a redefinition of gerontology because it is not confined to 'old age', or the connection between becoming middle aged and our subsequent fears of 'old age' and death: Age Studies is inclusive and encompasses the socially constructed nature of ageing and its implications for everyone, whatever their biological age. Because Age Studies is a relatively new movement which not everyone has access to or an awareness of, this means that the focus in Western Societies remains a desire for products and strategies which stop the ageing process, rather than concepts and ideas involving awareness of its culturally constructed nature. Being aged by culture includes, inter alia, socialisation from an early age into acceptance of an ageist ideology that is gendered (because it discriminates against women even more than against men), or being aware of the cultural signals that one is 'entering' the next age group (these might be learning the discourse of the menopause or acceptance that age will have a glass ceiling effect in terms of one's job and status).

Age Studies is, therefore, under-theorised, because unlike the other relations of difference such as race or gender, ageing is still at a stage where the focus is on its biological and bodily manifestations. These are foregrounded as the primary considerations, thus its cultural significance remains largely unnoticed by most people. We can draw parallels to the way in which it was once acceptable and logical to conceive of Caucasian males as inherently superior. Today, however, we regard that position as untenable. Age, on the other hand, is still at the point where youth (or, at the very least, a youthful appearance) is perceived to be an enviable goal. The envy carries with it a type of superiority in the same sense that the construct of the Caucasian male once did.

Gullette (2004:1) describes her experience of observing children at the Boston Museum of Science who, with the help of computer science, were able to see what they will (apparently) look like as they get older. The exhibit was called "Face Aging" and only those under the age of fifteen were able to participate. The outcome is presented to these children in a particularly negative manner: the biological characteristics that can be associated with ageing are exaggerated (for example, grey hair, sagging skin). It is these types of attitudes which assist in socialising children into believing getting older is a horror story and help to perpetuate the discourses of decline.

Taking a culturalist position in relation to age acknowledges that, although there may not be exact agreement on what age actually is, it is possible to perceive age and ageing in a different way, one that would not view self-help guides or anti-ageing strategies as the natural way to deal with ageing (2004:102). A major problem, which Gullette acknowledges, is that it is very difficult to persevere with a redefinition of the concept of ageing because the negative associations are very powerful.

Gullette (2004:105) questions whether theories that apply to race and gender can be applied to age with similar results. Dealing with age, she argues, works somewhat differently. People think age is always about those older than they are, rather than about themselves, and they do not want to deal with focussing on the concept of ageing because it can bring them in touch with feelings about themselves. If people do deal with it, as we are doing here, it is because we've had the courage to face up to our own advancing years, something which immediately disadvantages us. There is always the assumption that a project on ageing is for

older people, not something that might be studied by undergraduates or young people (2004:111).

Gullette challenges the concept of ageing in her books in many ways in order to demonstrate that age is all around us. She includes stories about her mother, her childhood, her son, herself and her working life to illustrate her arguments. Moreover, Gullette purposely does not present these stories in a chronological order. This is to present a challenge to the linearity of the life course which is taken for granted. In so doing she attempts to create an awareness of her point that the processes which depict ageing are not always obvious (2004:112).

Unlike other constructions which are also linked to the body, age is far more difficult to challenge because two of its attributes, change and continuity, cannot be avoided, yet they are contradictory at the same time (ibid, 2004:107). When we are young, there are acknowledged stages such as birth and puberty. Age in these 'stages' is thought of positively, as points in time, along a continuum. When we start to use terms such as 'age' and 'ageing' we are taken immediately to the other end and what is associated with that part of the life course, death: 'Aging discourse slides into dying discourse without critique…' (ibid, 2004:107).

Putting it another way, Gullette (2004:107) writes, 'Decline narrative always has the death card up its sleeve'. It is very difficult to argue with the 'death card' and the subsequent 'obvious-ness' and 'commonsense' negativity with which we therefore regard our ageing

bodies. Because we prefer to disregard where ageing inevitably leads (or where we are taught that it leads), and because it affects us all, it is hard to see how there can be a radical change in the conceptualisation of age. Ageing is, in many ways, a taboo topic which seems to involve 'others', rarely ourselves. The reality is that age is relevant because it affects everyone at all times in two fundamental ways: biologically and culturally. The distancing that many of us seek from its manifestations prevents us from understanding its impact. This is what sets age apart from relations of difference such as ethnicity and gender: ageing involves us all. Everyone belongs in an age group and is subject to its effects. Although those effects have biological implications, it is its cultural effects which often have devastating consequences. The biological implications lend legitimacy to the cultural associations linked to older age groups and these are mostly negative.

Women's magazines as a site for analysis

Some twenty years ago, Itzin (1986) conducted sociological research into ageism and sexism in women's magazines. As she points out (and other scholars such as Johnston & Swanson, 2003a&b, reiterate) women's magazines are an important site for analysis in Western cultures. This is because they are readily available and widely read. Itzin quotes figures for 1980 which show that some 49% of women in the UK are magazine readers. Her research involved content analysis but was not linguistic in any detail. Itzin (ibid:130) concludes that the combination of ageism and sexism evident in the magazines provides a 'devastating' message for women in terms of their own self-worth. If one accepts the observation of Johnston & Swanson (2003a&b) that women's magazines are fundamental in providing a source of identity information for women, it is worth considering some aspects that relate to

women's magazines in general, followed by points relating to the particular titles referred to in this thesis.

Smith (1990:200) argues that women's magazines function like trade magazines. This is because the topics discussed work together with the advertising. She contends this similarity is not obvious because the 'discourse of femininity' rejects or is in opposition to what is referred to as masculine styles, by which I take to mean the language and layout of many trade magazines. Although women's magazines are not overt in the way they promote technical expertise, the topics under discussion (for example, recipes, instructional pieces) are commonly linked to the purchase of particular products. Observations concerning the links between content, advertising and revenue in magazines are not, of course, new. Winship (1987:39) has drawn attention to the fact that, financially, a magazine can only exist in tandem with a readership which is likely to buy its advertisers' products. Hence, articles and content are structured around advertising and products, increasing the likelihood that women will identify with the products that they buy.

As Smith (1990:193) exemplifies, the achievement of 'looking good' involves adhering to a set of norms and conventions revolving around what she terms 'texts of discourse' that is, compliance with the marketing strategies, images and purchase of products and knowledge about them. All this involves work and self-improvement in order to be able to claim membership of and participation in femininity. As Smith (ibid) reminds us, however, women cannot rectify every appearance 'defect'. Women grow older, making them less able to conform to ideals of youthfulness; they are increasingly unable to participate fully in feminine activities, for example, they are denied 'heterosexual sociality' (ibid:194). The last

point is one of the most crucial. This is because the underlying motivation for most mainstream women's magazines (whatever their surface structure) is to reinforce the importance of heterosexual relationships and activities.

This particular aspect which has been noted by Benwell & Stokoe (2006:82) as taken for granted within conversational interaction can also be applied to women's magazines. It is the perpetuation of 'unnoticed heterosexuality'. This means that heterosexuality is presupposed to be normal behaviour and it is taken for granted that a heterosexual relationship is a desirable goal. There are very few articles that deal with homosexual relationships. However, many articles do highlight the positive aspects of being single, a state which will apply to many people today and consequently to many women magazine readers. In fact, it can be argued that the very existence of these articles, even those which stress the positive points of being single, highlight it as 'marked' and possibly deviant behaviour. All of these points are discussed more fully within the central chapters of the thesis. For example, Chapter 7, which discusses age gap relationships, highlights the importance of heterosexual relationships, while Chapter 6, which deals with celebrities, discusses the positive and liberating aspects of being single.

The magazines in the study

Finally, then, in this review, I detail some facts and observations about each of the magazines included in this study. Ferguson (1983) has observed that titles specifically aimed at women have existed in the UK for over 300 years from the time when *The Ladies' Mercury* was launched in 1693. This and other magazines which emerged in the decades that followed

were aimed at an upper middle or upper class readership. It was only during the latter decades of the nineteenth century that advertising revenue became a crucial ingredient, as the magazines became geared towards instructing their readers what to buy and how to dress. Moreover, the expansion of titles around this time was aided by factors such as increased literacy rates, cheaper printing and better transport links in the UK. Indeed as Ferguson (ibid) points out, many of the titles launched during the early part of the twentieth were still available at the time she was writing and, indeed still are, some 25 years later (for example, *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home* were launched in 1922 and 1926 respectively). These and other similar titles were preoccupied with the reader's domestic and familial concerns. Women's magazines today still place heavy emphasis on these areas (the private sphere), but the public sphere (work and status) is increasingly stressed to take account additional roles adopted by many women in Western societies today.

The Monthly titles

Title: Good Housekeeping, Circulation: 468,579, Readership: 1,596,000 (175,000 male), Median readership age: 51

According to the publisher's (The National Magazine Company) website (www.natmags.co.uk), *Good Housekeeping* used to consist of domestic articles, sometimes by well-known contemporary figures. This contrasts with its current structure where it is 'more a lifestyle magazine targeting grown-up women'. The median age of the readership is 51. Interestingly, the core *Good Housekeeping* buyer has a 'partner' (rather than: 'is married'), a home and a family. Moreover, she is 'no longer pressurised by the need to conform. She is confident in her roles and in herself'. This links with a recurring theme in many of the articles that have been analysed. The older 'real reader' or celebrity does not feel the pressure to achieve that they once experienced as a younger person.

Titles of women's magazines, for example, *Woman & Home* or *Good Housekeeping* can signal and define the readership. It is less likely to be the case these days that an older/more mature woman would *necessarily* be interested in making the 'home' or in being a 'good housekeeper' the focus of her attention, her raison d'être. Nevertheless, the words carry with them associations (or connotations) of responsibilities of home and family in way that is less evident in the titles or magazines aimed at a younger readership (for example, *Company*, *Cosmopolitan*).

The title, *Good Housekeeping*, is reworked by the publishers as defining all the areas of interest in the reader's life: attention to appearance, looking after herself and her family, managing money, holidays and social engagements. They try to define it thus: 'to her [the reader] "good housekeeping" means being informed, discerning, organised and up to date'. Here, the meaning of the title extends beyond its possible original meaning when it was first published in 1922 to cleverly encompass a more current approach, that of 'housekeeping' to mean managing one's life more efficiently, keeping it up to date and in order. Linked to the magazine is The Good Housekeeping Institute, a consumer protection, research and testing organisation, which evaluates commercial products likely to be of interest to readers, and details them in the magazine. It runs an accreditation scheme with an approved logo which manufacturers and retailers apply for and may be granted for a period of 12 months on successful completion of a series of tests.

Source: http://www.natmags.co.uk/magazines/magazine.asp?id=4

Title: Woman & Home, Circulation: 335,992, readership: 726,000, females: 94%, Readership age: 35+, Social groups of readership: 36% A,B women, 74% married, 84% homeowners

Like *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman & Home* is today also branded as a 'lifestyle' magazine and 'epitomises a 'brand new attitude' for women over 35' (www.ipcmedia.com). The publishers believe that *Woman & Home* was the first of the lifestyle titles to 'echo this spirit', also claiming that the content is a 'stylish mix…reflecting the way women live and work today', the implication being that today women in the 35+ age group live their life differently to previous generations of women. The content is outlined in a similar way to that of *Good Housekeeping*, as broadly covering appearance, relationships, food and 'discovering new experiences' which again emphasises the 'new' approach in an older woman's outlook, suggesting that, perhaps in contrast to previous times, this is a time of beginnings rather than marking a time of life one approaches believing things will stay the same.

Source: http://www.ipcmedia.com/magazines/womanhome/

Title: Easy Living, Circulation: 182,146, Readership age: 30-50, Social groups: A,B,C1,C2

Easy Living was launched in March 2005 and while it has been suggested that it threatens *Good Housekeeping* (and presumably *Woman & Home*), the publisher disagrees, asserting that the title is aimed at a younger audience (see PPA, 2004). Although the word 'stylish' is again used to describe its content, the magazine, as the editor, Susie Forbes states, is not concerned with changing people (PPA, 2004), implying, perhaps, that this may be a purpose connected to other women's titles.

Source: Periodical Publishers Association , 2004

The Weekly titles

Title: Best, Circulation: 400,807, readership: 925,000, Readership age: 25-55, median age: 43, Social groups: B,C1,C2+

Best magazine (which shares the same publishers as GH) was launched in 1987 by Gruner and Jahr (UK) whose portfolio was purchased in 2000 by The National Magazine Company. Perhaps unsurprisingly the strapline is: 'Britain's best weekly'. 'Stylish' is once more used to describe the title and this time it is to set it apart from its competitors: it is 'more stylish than other weeklies…'. Readers are assumed to be married, homeowners, working and have children. The emphasis is on the practicality of the 'ideal' reader who will want tips (or, as the publisher puts it '…want[s] to be inspired…') on similar topics to those contained in the monthlies: appearance, food preparation and domestic issues. The practical side of both reader and magazine are highlighted, together with an emphasis on the 'real reader' stories.

Source: http://www.natmags.co.uk/magazines/magazineACP.asp?id=19

Title: Bella, Circulation: 380,973 readership: 1,274,000 (150,000 male), Readership age: 25-54, median age: 43, Social groups: B,C1,C2+

Like *Best, Bella* was launched by a German publisher in 1987, to rival long-standing weekly titles such as *Woman* and *Woman's Own*. The noun phrase: 'stylish practicals' is used to describe the content, foregounding the same attributes as *Best* and 'real life' stories are once again emphasised. The publishers claim the magazine has a 'true understanding of women today' and it is presented as keeping abreast with changes in the concerns of its readership and may be considered by advertisers wishing to reach the high social groups of women.

Source: http://www.bauer.co.uk/website/bella.cfm

Title: Woman, Circulation: 456,524, readership: 1,152,000, Readership age: 20-40 (under 45: 48%), Social groups: A,B,C1 (46%)

The reader of *Woman* is likely to have her own home (72%) and also to work (55%) and to be 'busy'. According to the publisher (IPC magazines), there is an emphasis on modernity, practicality and advice. In addition, real life stories that are unusual are foregrounded. As in the case of *Best*, the magazine is presented as something its readers 'treat' themselves to every week, perhaps because it provides a break from everyday tasks and responsibilities.

Source: http://www.ipcmedia.com/magazines/woman

Title: Woman's Own, Circulation: 409,616, readership: 1,490,000, Readership age: 20-40 (under 45: 48%),Social groups: ABC1 (46%)

Also published by IPC, *Woman's Own*, perhaps unsurprisingly, shares a very similar readership profile to *Woman* and it seems reasonable to suggest that a proportion of readers will purchase both magazines or alternate between the two. Once again, true life and celebrity stories are emphasised, as is practicality and various aspects of the ideal reader's life, for example, appearance, food, consumer and advice. The publishers also point out that: 'Britain's most trusted woman's weekly has had a makeover' suggesting it has now been brought up to date in line with its readership.

Source: http://www.ipcmedia.com/magazines/womansown/

The 'new' magazines

Best and *Bella* are what Winship (1992:111) referred to a short while after their launch as 'the new practical magazines'. By this she was referring not only to their content but their often 'grid' like appearance, four or five columns 'boxed off' containing short articles. The layout

is therefore: 'busy, dense and newsy' (ibid:111), with a substantial emphasis on practical strategies. The practicality observed by Winship (ibid) is evident in the publisher's (current) website information as both use 'practical' to describe magazine content (www.ipcmedia.com; www.natmags.co.uk).

Interestingly Winship (1992:111) drew attention to readership survey statistics from 1988 which demonstrated that the readership of both *Bella* and *Best* consisted of a greater proportion of younger readers (those under 34) than was the case for either *Woman* or *Woman's Own*. While *Easy Living* overlaps with both *Woman & Home* and *Good Housekeeping* in content and targeted readership age range, Forbes was keen to stress that *Easy Living* is aimed at a readership perhaps 13 years younger than for *Good Housekeeping* (PPA, 2004).

There is, of course, the possibility that the newer magazines intentionally capture younger audiences but will grow, change and adapt as these women readers become older in order to accommodate and retain them. In the case of *Best* and *Bella* for example, it is possible that this is already happening and, in fact, may not be too difficult to achieve if one takes into account the theoretical observations of Featherstone & Hepworth (1991:371) and the comments of Meyrowitz (1985:227) regarding a merging of age categories and a more 'uni-age' style , in terms of lifestyle, fashions and interests than was previously the case. Tied into this is the fact that, relatively recently (June, 2006) both *Woman* and *Woman's Own* have undergone 'makeovers' themselves in an attempt to bring both appearance and content up to date and relevant to their readership. On the one hand perhaps this represents an attempt to attract and maintain younger audiences, but on the other, it may simply be that the titles want

to maintain their current readership, perhaps by taking into account or demonstrating that they too are aware of a 'uni-age' style (Meyrowitz, 1985:227) and of the possibility that what it means to be older in Western societies is currently being redefined.

Conclusion

To conclude, then, despite the fact that work on ageing is not as extensively researched or developed as a topic as other relations of difference, a growing body of work does exist, particularly within the field of Cultural Studies. In addition, pioneering sociolinguistic work has been and continues to be carried out on contemporary texts by scholars at the Centre for Language and Communication Research at Cardiff University. Finally, some scholars, most notably Andrews (1999; 2000) have drawn attention to and questioned so-called positive images or redefinitions of age and ageing, a point taken up explicitly by a number of my interview informants. More could be done, however, on what I have attempted to outline as a fundamentally important topic, one which we may indeed prefer to avoid, but one which, nevertheless, affects us all: the socially constructed nature of the ageing process.

Chapter 3: Research design and research methodology

In this chapter, I set out and review the methodological approach taken in this study, which investigates representations of ageing in women's magazines. The study was conducted through an analysis of media texts and of interviews with women magazine readers. I start by detailing the initial hypothesis and subsequent research questions. I then consider the framework in which the research was carried out, which was designed as being the most appropriate way to answer the research questions. Next, I consider the methods I used to gather my data (the magazine texts and twelve interviews), and the problems and concerns encountered both in the design and execution of the approach. The latter point is particularly relevant to both the planning stages of the interview process and to the interviews themselves as will become clear during the course of this chapter. I will therefore spend some time considering how certain factors (for example, the initial difficulties I had in recruiting interview informants) may have affected my work, either positively or negatively. I follow with a discussion of the ethical issues involved in this research which relate almost exclusively to the interview process. I detail the steps taken to ensure that the ethical guidelines, of both Roehampton University and the British Association for Applied Linguists (BAAL), were considered and adhered to. Finally, I set out the desirability for a reflexive component in this account and the methodological approach taken to achieve this.

Hypothesis and research questions

In order to test the hypothesis that what it means to be an 'older' person in Britain today is being re-negotiated and re-defined in a more positive way, I examined (as my primary data) a small corpus of media texts from women's magazines. Women's magazines were chosen

because, as Johnston & Swanson (2003a:24) observe, media texts, most notably women's magazines, are pervasive in Western cultures and can be considered as prominent sources of identity information for women. Moreover, they are instrumental in the preservation of cultural values because they construct an ideal or implied reader who is both created and constrained by the texts (Caldas-Coulthard, 1999:523). They are therefore important sites for analysis and interpretation of representations of women (see also Itzin, 1986; Winship, 1987). A linguistic and semiotic analysis of a variety of texts from a selection of women's magazines would, therefore, be instructive in revealing how representations of ageing are underpinned. Moreover, a complementary analysis of interviews with magazine readers would, it was envisaged, provide evidence as to the role media texts play in constituting how age/ageing identity is negotiated or, on the other hand, to what extent media texts simply reflect social structure (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002).

Furthermore, the hypothesis was based on the idea that representations (by which I mean constructions of reality) are structured around certain 'myths' (Barthes, 1972) of ageing. Those that I identified were as follows:

- ageing is a decline scenario: it involves both mental and physical decline;
- ageing is synonymous with loss of power: sexual, economic and social;
- ageing must be resisted.

The research questions that guided the work for this thesis were, therefore:

RQ1: What representations (that is, what constructions of reality) of age and ageing are portrayed and promoted in women's magazines aimed at the 35-60 year old market (i.e. the so-called "mid-life" category)?

RQ2: Is the construction of an 'age identity' underpinned by the Myths of Ageing which I have identified?

RQ3: What are the main linguistic and semiotic devices deployed in these representations?

RQ4: What is the relationship between the representations in the media texts and the attitudes and perceptions towards age and ageing of the readers of those magazines? In other words, how is meaning derived from these texts?

Research design

Taking into account the hypothesis and research questions which I have outlined above, certain key decisions were then taken with regard to the design and execution of this project.

The research was conducted within a qualitative research framework, rather than a quantitative one. This is to say that I was not systematically counting occurrences of, for example, a specific language feature in the corpus of data that I collected. My main goal was in attempting to understand how a biological process (getting older) is experienced in terms of a woman's social and cultural identity in this historical moment. In order to do this, the research was conducted in two major strands: text analysis of selected articles drawn from a corpus of texts from women's magazines; and interviews with women magazine readers. Thus, the magazines were used as a site for investigating how ageing is represented, because of their importance as a source of identity information for women (see Johnston & Swanson, 2003a&b). The data gathered from the research participants provided the source for how it is interpreted and understood by readers. The data from both sources enabled a fuller and more complete understanding of this particular aspect of our social and cultural life than one source would have.

This does not mean that it is merely a case of setting out what I have found, that is, simply recording 'facts' (see Miller, 1997:3). The data has been analysed according to a specific theoretical framework (see Chapter 4). Moreover, my own relationship and the way I have positioned myself within this research has also been analysed in a later section within this chapter.

Selection of magazine titles

Women's magazines in the UK are widespread and available in many public sites, both to read and to buy. Moreover, there are many titles from which to choose: some titles are available on a monthly basis; others are published weekly. In order to gain a representative sample, I chose titles from among those published monthly and those published weekly.

The selection of both weekly and monthly titles was made following a preliminary study of the articles and contents pages and this process was instrumental in confirming the appropriateness of the titles eventually selected. The titles were also compared to other contenders and were chosen or rejected as much for what they were not, as for what they were. For example, monthly titles, such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home* deviated somewhat in style and content from other monthly titles such as *Company* or *Red:* the former two titles appear to be aimed at including the baby boomer readers. A glance at the publishing information for the latter two titles confirms a target readership age differential: 54 per cent of the readership of *Company* falls into the 15-24 age category, while only 6 per cent of readers are over 45 (source: www.natmags.co.uk), while *Red* has a

median readership age of 32 and is aimed at 'middle youth' (source: www.redmagazine.co.uk). As the advertiser's information for *Company* magazine explains:

> Company readers are having the time of their lives – they can shop when they want, go clubbing when they want and they don't have millstones like mortgages and kids around their necks… They are probably in debt thanks to student loans plus an overzealous credit card habit but they are putting it to the back of their minds right now…. (source: www.natmags.co.uk)

In short, *Company* readers do not include many readers of the 35+ group. On the other hand:

> Woman&Home magazine is a real success story. As the fastest-growing lifestyle title for women, it epitomises a 'brand new attitude' for women over 35. It was the first magazine to echo this new spirit and each month presents a stylish mix of content reflecting the way women live and work today. The magazine covers all areas of a woman's life – but in a fresh modern way. (source: www.ipcadvertising.com)

On this basis, *Woman & Home* clearly fits the readership age criterion for inclusion in this study. A similar process was followed in the selection (or rejection) of all of the titles that were considered from the vast array of titles available in the UK today.

In terms of glossy monthly titles, there does not appear to be a title aimed exclusively at those aged 50 and over, at least, not one that is readily available on the news-stands, although it should be pointed out that at least one informant made reference to *Saga Magazine*. However, the magazine is not aimed solely at women (publishing information lists readers at a ratio of 60/40 per cent. women to men (www.saga.co.uk)). Arguably, therefore, while there is an overlap to a certain extent between the three broad categories of magazines I have outlined here and some regular readers of *Company* or *Red* will, doubtless, find topics and articles of interest in *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman & Home* (and vice versa), it is less likely that they will be drawn on a regular basis to *Saga Magazine*. Indeed, one of my

informants, aged around forty, made reference to it in terms of coming across it amongst her mother's things after she had died, and reading it. She distanced herself, however, from it by stating that this was the type of publication in which she felt older people might find positive role models and lifestyles for growing older (but she did not include herself in that category).

Good Housekeeping, *Woman & Home* and *Easy Living* were the monthly titles finally chosen as sites for the text analysis. The justification for these titles is that the publishers' target readership age for each title very broadly fits an approximation of the 'midlife' category or the 35 plus age group referred to in RQ1 above (see Chapter 2 for an outline of the publishers' information for each title). Furthermore, an initial study of the articles and the contents pages therein supported my choice: from the celebrities who grace the cover of almost every issue, through the fashion pages to the 'real life' genres, women from around 36 upwards are prominently foregrounded in both image and text. This is not to say that no woman under the age of 36 is ever referred to in these publications, but close reading over an extended period of time revealed that younger women were only rarely mentioned.

Woman, *Woman's Own*, *Bella* and *Best* were the weekly titles eventually chosen. As in the case of the monthlies, the publishing information was a guiding factor in the selection of the titles as was a study of the articles and contents pages. As far as the weeklies are concerned, there are perhaps one or two other titles that could have been considered instead of or in addition to those that were chosen. An example might be *Grazia*: like *Easy Living*, this is a relative newcomer to the market. Once again, however, an argument against this title would be the readership age (the average is 33) (www.bauermedia.co.uk) , which tips it into the 'middle youth' rather than the 'midlife' category.

Data collection: the magazines

One of the first decisions to be made was: with what frequency should the magazines be studied? In any one month of the period under study up to 23 magazines (depending on the length of the month) of the chosen titles might be published and therefore potentially available for study, creating a sizeable potential data source. It seemed reasonable, therefore, to limit study of the magazines in a systematic way. As Potter & Wetherell (1987:161) point out, dealing with too much data can have the effect of submerging the researcher, often adding little value to the research process. Working on this principle, I decided that:

- During **Phase 1** of the study (October 2005 to June 2006) every issue of each of the three monthly titles was studied. In addition, one issue per month of each of the four weekly titles was studied.
- During **Phase 2** of the study (September 2007 to January 2008) one issue of each of the three monthly titles per two months was studied. In addition, one issue per two months of each of the four weekly titles was studied.
- No magazines were studied during December 2006 and December 2007, as the Christmas issues of 2005 suggested that traditional Christmas activities were prevalent in all the magazines to the exclusion of many other features that seemed to occur at all other times.

From a study, therefore, of approximately 105 magazines in total, a corpus of potential texts for analysis was gathered from various genres throughout the magazines (for example, 'real life' features, celebrity articles, readers' letters and editorials).

Potter & Wetherell's (ibid) comments apply as much to data collection within the interview process, as to the collection of suitable texts for analysis from the magazines. As they put it:

> For discourse analysts the success of a study is *not* in the least dependent on sample size. It is *not* the case that a larger sample size necessarily indicates a more painstaking or worthwhile piece of research. Indeed, more interviews can often simply add to the labour involved without adding anything to the analysis (1987:161, emphasis in original)

In other words, too much data can hinder rather than add value by increasing the workload for little or no gain. If I had attempted to read every issue of all seven titles ('too much' material), I might not have been able to commit as much attention to detail as was possible because I had limited the number of issues (and the number of interviews I conducted) to a number I considered reasonable to study thoroughly. Moreover, as I used a combination of methods, in this case, document (or text) analysis and interviews, there was a limit to what could be achieved within the parameters of the thesis (which includes my own resources as sole researcher on this project) in terms of material chosen in either case for analysis (Darlington & Scott, 2002:53).

Data collection: text selection

The central chapters, at the heart of the thesis, contain the analysis of data, both talk and text. Each of these chapters is concerned with one of three separate key themes which emerged from the data analysis as themes in which repeating patterns occurred in the way getting older was described and discussed. It would be impossible to analyse or even draw upon the entire corpus of texts collected, but by dividing the analysis into sections, each dealing with a major theme or key area, I have drawn on what I consider to be a representative sample of texts. The three key areas are:

1. the redefinition of cultural roles;

2. celebrities coping with or interpreting the ageing process;

3. older women and relationships.

Within each section, representative texts have been selected for a detailed analysis, according to the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 4.

Data collection: interviews with magazine readers

I carried out a series of interviews with women magazine readers in order to determine if the data gained would either support (or refute) my text analysis. The intention of this phase of the research was that the interview data would provide a validation or triangulation for my own findings (see section below on Validation of Findings). Moreover, it seemed important to try to understand whether 'real' readers (of which I am one) understand and interpret the texts in particular ways that were similar, or whether the texts were capable of being interpreted in a number of ways. I wanted to see if there were specific or repeating patterns in the language the informants used to describe these phenomena. For this part of the study, there were broadly two methods of data collection between which I could choose. Here, I was attempting to uncover women readers' experience of reading women's magazines, their views about themselves (and women generally) growing older and how they considered that the magazines represented ageing. I could therefore choose to administer a written questionnaire or conduct interviews with my informants.

A written questionnaire format would have been easier to administer, less time-consuming for both me, the researcher, and for the informants who agreed to fill the questionnaires in than face to face interviews would inevitably be. However, there were a number of weaknesses that I considered precluded this approach. For example, since the aim of this part of the study was to access the attitudes and perceptions of female magazine readers, I would have used an *open* questionnaire format (where respondents reply as they wish), rather than using *closed* questions which ask for a particular type of restricted reply. Even so, there was the distinct possibility that respondents might not give as full responses as I would hope for, not least because people tend to fill in written questionnaires quickly (see Cohen et al, 2000:269 for a discussion of this point). A written questionnaire, even with open questions, simply would not allow the researcher to probe in depth or expand on relevant or interesting points that might arise, as would be possible within an interview.

In a qualitative research interview, the researcher tries to understand how their informant sees and experiences the world and how they live it, their attitudes and perceptions to their life and that which they hope for, in other words, their dreams (Kvale, 1996:1). The interview would provide the space to elicit affective factors such as these. The qualitative research interview was the appropriate research instrument, therefore, to use to collect my secondary data. Cohen et al (2000:279) describe an interview as a 'social, interpersonal encounter' rather than just a method of collecting data. Andersen & Arsenault (1998) believe it to be a specialised form of communication which goes beyond a mere conversation. As Kvale (1996:6) puts it:

> An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach…The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic of the interview is introduced by the researcher…

The appropriateness of a face to face interview is made clear here, because I would also be in a position to steer the interaction so as to allow the maximum opportunity to gain data relevant to this study.

Furthermore, an interview is an extremely flexible research instrument because it can take a number of forms along a continuum from unstructured to structured. So, for example, while an unstructured interview makes use of an aide-memoire (with perhaps one single, opening question) to prompt what is essentially a conversation, a completely structured interview would involve asking specific questions in a particular order and each interview would follow exactly the same format (Bryman, 2004:319-321). In this research context, the weakness of the former is that not only would it be hard to organise what is talked about, but also the conversation might bear little relevance to the study aims. The problem with the latter approach is that it was likely my informants would vary in age and background and topics that might be appropriate in one interview might very well be better avoided or seem irrelevant in another.

Somewhere between the two extremes of these interview methods lies the semi-structured interview (or interview guide approach) which makes use of a list of questions or research topics as a guide (Cohen et al, 2000:271). Both interviewer and interviewee have a lot of freedom within the interview format as to the questions which are asked and in what order, and how the respondent might reply. In addition, the interview guide and its schedule of questions may not be completely adhered to: using this type of approach can often involve on the spot decisions as to whether to stick to the guide or digress and develop a particular

topic (Kvale, 1996:84). This indeed proved to be the case: the different profiles of my informants meant that a line of conversation and questioning might be developed in one interview, but not pursued in another.

Taking the points mentioned above into account, it is evident that a semi-structured interview format provides enough flexibility in the way it can be structured and adapted to suit the requirements of each individual interview. It was one which I judged would be likely to enable me to elicit the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of my informants towards ageing and its representations in the magazines. A lack of rigidity within the interview process was crucial in providing maximum opportunity for the elicitation of relevant data.

The interview guide

The interview guide (see Appendix A1) was structured using the knowledge I had gained from studying the magazines in question for some considerable time beforehand in terms of relevant myths and themes. The guide took account of Kvale's (1996:124) point that the form of the semi-structured interview follows a sequence of themes or topics to be discussed and some questions. As he puts it:

> *Thematically* the questions relate to the topic of the interview, to the theoretical conceptions at the root of an investigation, and to the subsequent analysis' (1996:129), and:
>
> '*Dynamically*, the questions should…keep the flow of conversation going and motivate the subjects to talk about their experiences and feelings. The questions should be easy to understand, short, and devoid of academic language (1996:130).

A good strategy is to start with non-threatening questions which can become progressively more challenging, although what is considered challenging is open to interpretation (see Schensul et al, 1999). In this research situation, challenging would very much depend on how the interviewee felt about the interview process, how willing they were to 'open up' in a semi-formal context and relate experiences, attitudes and feelings on what might potentially be an uncomfortable topic, knowing that their words were being recorded. It became apparent, for example, in at least two interviews, that, although, on the surface the informants had expressed no particular concerns about being interviewed around the topic of ageing, when it came to the point of answering questions which required them to talk about themselves in (possibly) some depth, they did not always feel comfortable in doing so, at least not initially. However, it was almost always the case, because of the approach I took and the way I positioned myself in relation to the interviewee (see later sections), that informants relaxed a little way into the interview process.

The questionnaire guide starts, therefore, with what I considered to be easy, warm-up questions. These were mainly *closed* questions (for example, questions that ask for factual detail, such as name, age and occupation). I then moved on to more abstract questions: those which involve thoughts, attitudes, feelings and perceptions (Q4 onwards). These were predominantly *open* questions which place little restriction on how the informant may answer. These allowed me to explore topics in depth and enabled me to achieve a more detailed assessment of the informant's attitudes and perceptions (Cohen et al, 2000:275).

While drafting the interview guide, my main concern was to be aware of leading informants, steering them into giving particular answers or 'putting ideas into their heads' by presenting them with presuppositions that would inevitably frame their responses. I state that my main

concern was to 'be aware' because as Kvale (1996:158) points out, while a question's wording can 'inadvertently shape the content of an answer', leading questions are vital in many questioning scenarios and the issues associated with them have been (in his view) made too much of in some research contexts. He argues that it is not a case of avoiding leading questions because, in many research situations, one is looking for certain types of answers, which are related to a particular theme or topic, and the way the question is framed determines this. What is important is to be explicit in one's questioning so that the reader of the research is in a position to evaluate the research knowing precisely what has occurred.

Kvale's alternative viewpoint (1996:159) is that because the interview is, in fact, a conversation, and the data is elicited 'in an interpersonal relationship' produced collaboratively by researcher and informant, it is not a case of leading questions but of where the questions ultimately lead and if they will result in some new contribution to knowledge. A reasonable conclusion seems to be that in order to elicit data which is relevant to the study one must ask questions that are likely to produce answers which will enable the researcher to answer the research questions. In order to do this, questions must be framed and based on themes which relate to the topic being researched. It is not a case, therefore, of designing a 'flawless' interview guide with questions so carefully constructed that they do not appear to relate directly to what it is the researcher wants to know. The position I took was that: 'if you want to know about something, you have to ask'. The important aspect here was to be aware of the strengths and limitations of both myself, as researcher, and my research instruments (in this case the interview guide). With the exception of the first two (which were tape recorded), the interviews were digitally recorded, then downloaded to a PC so that they could be listened to with maximum ease, through the PC, as they were being transcribed and analysed. I also took handwritten notes of salient points periodically during the interview.

Choice of informants for interview

The majority of the interviews took place in the Summer of 2007. This was due to several factors, which I will go into in some detail. It was initially fairly difficult to find suitable informants, which is perhaps somewhat surprising, given the vast number of readers of women's magazines. My first strategy was to write to the editors of the seven magazines under study to ask for assistance in locating suitable informants (for example, by advertising in the magazines themselves). Inspiration for this approach came from Ang's (1985:10) work where she advertised in a Dutch weekly women's magazine for viewers of the television series *Dallas* to write to her expressing their feelings, either positive or negative, towards the series. Although the focus of my research was completely different (Ang was interested in how viewers experienced watching *Dallas*), I considered this might be an appropriate method. Had I been focussing on only one or two titles (rather than seven) I might simply have placed an advertisement and paid for it, rather than relying on the goodwill of the editors. Unfortunately, my initial strategy was unsuccessful yielding only one (negative) reply. Following this failure, I had the opportunity of advertising on an institutional office intranet as I had a contact who worked for a particular (training) organisation. It was judged that a sizeable proportion of the workforce was likely to fall within the requirements of the study (that is, female magazine readers over the age of 35). Unfortunately, this strategy was also not successful, again yielding no replies.

I therefore decided to start the interview process by using (as my initial informants) people who fitted the research criteria (broadly speaking, women magazine readers, over the age of 35) who were also quite well known to me. This approach is essentially termed as

'convenience sampling' (Bryman, 2004:538), using, at least at the beginning, simply that which was available to use. The eventual procedure could, however, be better termed as 'snowball sampling' (Bryman, 2004:325) as I will explain. To begin with, a few contacts were chosen because they met the research criteria and because they were available. In practice, this involved using two people as the initial informants. Furthermore, I was also granted an interview with a parent of a child who was friendly with my own child through school. The hope and expectation was that this would lead on to more distant contacts, as the initial contacts introduced me to friends, acquaintances and (in some cases) relatives who were not known to me. After a shaky start, this strategy worked well. Two out of these initial three informants were instrumental in introducing me to others who were either less well known or not known at all to me. It was also the case that some of the more distant contacts then put me in touch with other prospective informants. In this way, I was able to complete my target of twelve interviews with magazine readers.

As proved to be the case in this study, snowballing can be a useful procedure when access is difficult (see Cohen et al, 2000:104) and, in this context, it is perhaps relevant to consider why these difficulties might have arisen. For example, although, superficially it may appear that the research topic is uncontroversial, my difficulties in recruiting possible informants to begin with provides support for one of my preliminary assessments which led to the conception of this project: that age is a topic which people avoid thinking about or do not wish to deconstruct. Women's magazines do deal directly with the process of ageing, but the general message is one of resistance and a concentration on strategies which mask the biological and social repercussions that affect ageing women. It is entirely possible, therefore, (although impossible to prove) that one of the reasons I had no offer of help from the magazine editors I wrote to may have been that the very act of the magazines themselves

drawing attention to and appearing to endorse my research topic might be (for those editors) a negative act which runs in opposition to the general message of the magazines. If readers are required to think in some detail about the representations of ageing in the magazines they are reading, some critical observations about those magazines might emerge (and this was indeed the case, as I will detail in later chapters, by drawing on the interview data). On the other hand, the single negative response and lack of responses generally may simply have been economic: why waste time on something which is likely to be of little benefit financially when someone is effectively asking for free advertising space?

Issues arising during the interview process

A close friend as informant

I had not really considered the issues I might encounter when interviewing someone I knew very well. My first interview was with Karen, a close friend, and I had envisaged it would be relatively relaxed. Essentially, it was a pilot interview. I quickly realised, however, that the interview situation inevitably shifted the relationship from one that is normally symmetrical to one where the balance of power, or the nature of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, meant that I would be directing the interaction but would expect most of the input to be from her. I also thought that I should avoid giving my opinions because the 'aim' was to try to access those of the interviewee. Fairly early on, however, I abandoned any semblance of the role I thought I should play (that is, 'neutral interviewer'), principally because the relationship between Karen and me would no longer be our normal one; it would have been artificially created for the purpose of my research. For one thing, I did not think I could sustain it. Moreover, I felt it was unfair to Karen, one of my closest friends, who was being generous with her time, to expect her to shift the parameters of our relationship and do

a lot more of the talking than she normally would when interacting with me. Coates (1996:11) describes how some of the close friends she interviewed regarded the interviews (or conversations): 'more as a rather strange kind of friendly conversation…than as a formal interview'. This was also principally my experience (I have no idea how Karen regarded the interaction because I did not ask her).

Oakley (1981:30-61) discusses in detail the difficulties of remaining an 'outsider' or someone who remains at a distance in the interviewing process. While traditionally, the interviewer is supposed to avoid giving their own opinions, or providing information about themselves, even when directly asked, Oakley demonstrates how that would not have worked in the interviews she conducted into women's transition into motherhood. The women Oakley interviewed sometimes viewed her as a confidante, someone with whom to exchange ideas and experiences.

It may be that when there is an assumption on the part of both participants (interviewer and interviewee) that the interviewer has had similar experiences or lifestyle issues as the interviewee, it becomes more difficult for the interviewer to remain distant. Moreover, when there is the expectation that interviewees are going to impart what could be termed as quite personal information, to do with (in Oakley's case) sex and childbirth or (in my own case) feelings and perceptions about themselves as older women, it seems unrealistic to expect them to do so to any truthful degree when someone is not willing to give anything in return, or indeed to engage in the interaction in the first place with an interviewer who is quite unlike themselves. For example, how easy would an older woman interviewee find discussing herself and her feelings with a young male interviewer? Would Karen have felt as

comfortable as the data from her interview would suggest discussing age related topics with anyone other than someone who knew her well, someone who shares a similar sociocultural profile to herself?

This preliminary experience set the tone for the remainder of the interviews. Despite the fact that no-one I subsequently interviewed was as well-known to me as Karen, I decided, that as far as possible, I would interact with each informant in a way that was appropriate to my social relationship with them. This would differ in each case, depending on how well I knew them (if at all) and in what capacity they were known to me (for example, friend, acquaintance, friend of a friend, parent of a friend or of an acquaintance). In all cases, therefore, I approached the interview as a situation in which I was discussing age related topics and women's magazines with another woman I knew to a greater or lesser extent. It was very often the case that, rather than an interview, it seemed as if we were just having a conversation over coffee, although clearly it was not exactly the same. As the researcher, I essentially defined and controlled what was discussed by introducing topics (Kvale, 1996:6).

As Hollway (1989:11) discusses, when you are enjoying talking to someone, it does not seem as if you are collecting data for a research project, or that it is a particularly difficult thing to do, especially when people are similar to you, the researcher, in both age and sociocultural profile. At the time of her own research, Hollway describes feeling dubious about what she was doing in calling it 'research', whereas having considered it reflectively, some years later, she can assess it as a valuable way to gather data, because her research participants felt comfortable talking to her about their own lives. My experience of data collection in some of the interviews I conducted was similar to hers in some respects; and as I have outlined above,

after the first interview with Karen I tried to interact with informants in a way that was appropriate to whatever relationship I already had with them. I attempted not to make the interaction overtly asymmetrical, keeping in mind the idea, that in taking an informal approach, I may well have encouraged my informants not to be as guarded as they might otherwise have been.

Technical issue: a telephone interview

I conducted one interview (with Catherine) by telephone. This was because the informant lived several hundred miles away and there was little likelihood of either of us travelling to the other's locality for several months. Anderson & Arsenault (1998:192) state that with good planning, there will be little difference in the validity of the data collected over the telephone to that of a face to face interview. In the interview I conducted, in which I used a speaker telephone and digitally recorded the interview as usual, the only problem I experienced was that I could not share a stack of magazines with my informant to glance through and talk about during the course of the interview. In addition, it was sometimes necessary to repeat or clarify both questions and responses as we did not have the paralinguistic cues that are available during a face to face interaction. Otherwise, I considered the interview as successful as any of the others that I conducted in that it provided me with valuable and useful data. That said, if all the interviews had been conducted by telephone, it is entirely possible that some informants may have remained not only at a physical distance but at a psychological one as well and some insights may not have been gained.

Validation of findings

Sections from the thesis which contained data obtained from the interviews conducted with the informants were made available to those informants for their comments. This is known as respondent validation (Bryman, 2004:274) and its purpose is to ensure that informants believe their words have been represented fairly. It also forms part of the BAAL (1994, 2006) ethical guidelines, which all sociolinguistic research should adhere to (see next section). I was prepared that my informants might suggest what they considered to be more accurate ways of expressing some of the things we discussed (Cohen et al, 2000:190), and indeed this had happened on a previous research project I had carried out. In addition, as Stake (1995:115) observes, those who have been investigated can read drafts and make observations, a process called 'member checking'. In this way they can also assist in triangulating the researcher's interpretations. Triangulation describes the process of using more than one research method to validate findings (Bryman, 2004:275). In this study, therefore, I have analysed and interpreted the magazine data which are the primary texts. In addition, I have also conducted interviews with women magazine readers in order to corroborate and complement the text analysis. Furthermore, I have made use of my informants' comments on the interview data and its analysis to assist in lending validity to the research process.

Ethical considerations

This section relates principally to the interview process. This phase of the research involved ethical considerations because human subjects are involved and I have certain responsibilities towards my informants.

This study adhered strictly to Roehampton University's guidelines set out in the University's manual (2008:E3-30), and was particularly mindful of the Principles of the Data Protection Act (1998) as set out on page E17-20 of the manual. Moreover, as I was working principally within the field of linguistics, I also took into account the guidelines of BAAL (1994, 2006) relating specifically to the conduct of linguistic research. A copy of these guidelines can be found at: http://www.baal.org.uk/about_goodpractice_full.pdf.

Furthermore, I provided informants with a form which detailed information about my research objectives, what assistance I needed from them and I also made them aware of the time that was required from them. The form was effectively a consent form for signature and ensured that my informants

- were aware of the research objectives;
- consented to being interviewed for the purposes of the research and consented to the interview being recorded;
- understood that they could withdraw at any time;
- were aware that I would guarantee their anonymity and that any information they have given me will remain confidential (although they are identifiable via a coding system, known only to myself, they are referred to by pseudonyms in the thesis)

(see Appendix A2).

Aspects of informants' identity (for example, age and gender) are, however, relevant to this study, so I made sure that participants understood that these details would be revealed. Hollway & Jefferson (2000:90) discuss the fact that, traditionally, confidentiality causes one of the least areas of concern ethically if data is processed securely and so as to preserve the anonymity of informants. As these researchers point out, however, it has become more

widespread in recent times that more biographical details become part of the research process. Concealing identities may, therefore, become more difficult, especially if informants read those sections of the research, unless the data is distorted to some extent. What might have been a related consideration in the case of this research, was the fact that, occasionally, a discussion or a comment would surface relating to someone that I and the informant both knew. The way I approached this dilemma was to avoid transcribing sections of the interview data where third parties known to us both (and possibly, then, to other informants) were discussed.

I originally envisaged that the interviews would be recorded on cassette tapes and had concluded those tapes would be kept in locked filing cabinets in my office at my home address. What eventually occurred was that the interview recordings were transferred directly from the digital recorder I finally used for this purpose and electronically downloaded to my home PC. The files were protected by password and therefore only I could access them. I move on now to the final section of this Chapter, in which I outline how the reflexive component is integrated into this study.

Reflexivity

Within the qualitative research paradigm, it has become accepted that the researcher is the key to the construction, execution and analysis of any research project. Rather than removing the researcher to the periphery of the research, it is desirable to acknowledge that the researcher shapes and defines the research, bringing his/her own frame of reference and life experience to what is finally constructed. Another researcher will do it in another way and produce a different accounts: see Finlay (2002a:1) for an elaboration of these points.

To be reflexive, therefore, involves acknowledging that I cannot remain detached and separate from the research process. This includes the data I collect, the texts I choose to analyse from those I have collected for the corpus, the way I conduct the interviews, the way the data is analysed and the way I choose to structure and write the thesis, making choices about what to include or to leave out as seems relevant to me. This means, therefore, acknowledging my own position in this research. This extends to the material I choose to include in, for example, the literature review (and by implication, that which is available to use but which I choose to leave out), as the literature review frames the way in which the thesis should be read (see Horton-Salway, 2001:149). It is my version and interpretation of 'relevant' work in the field, set out to contextualise the study and, as such, it is constructed in my terms. It is a version among many other versions or alternatives that could have been written, and I give it a legitimacy and structure, by using recognised academic styles and conventions.

There are many ways in which I could have included the reflexive component within this thesis. At the very least, I could simply reveal my own interest in age and ageing. As a member of the baby boomer generation myself, the issues connected with ageing that are written and talked about in magazines, in academic textbooks, in conversations with friends or even as a result of practical activities in daily life (from form-filling to exercise routines), all hold personal relevance. Another example of reflexivity might be one which I have already made explicit: the fact that I quickly abandoned playing the role of 'Research Interviewer' in the interviews I conducted. Thus, the reflexive account could be contained more or less within this chapter in the manner I have just described.

At the other end of the scale, I could have immersed myself in an introspective, potentially never-ending, critical self-analysis in this thesis, which would have been difficult to limit and, moreover, would probably have added little insight or value to this project. (See Finlay, 2002a:4; MacMillan, 1996 for an elaboration of these points, and Finlay, 2002b:543 for a discussion on the different variants of reflexivity and the levels to which they may be included in one's work.) As Gergen & Gergen (1991:79) argue, trying to understand one's own research efforts can lead inwards in a repetitive cycle, despite the researcher attempting to rise above it through their own reflection. This is because our cognitive system can only perform in a particular way, and so applies the same process in analysing itself. If, however, the researcher can keep their main focus on the informants or texts that are used, coming back only to themselves for growing awareness and insight, the inward spiral of regression can be avoided (Finlay, 2002(b):542). The challenge, of course, is the practical application of these points and the display of this practice within this thesis.

In practical terms, I consider that this makes an argument for allowing the reflexive process to be explicit in the analytical sections of the thesis as well as including it as part of this methodology chapter. A reflexive stance will be taken in the chapters where I conduct a textual analysis. The interpretations that I offer in these chapters will take into account the position that I occupy as analyst and researcher, but also my position as a magazine reader, not least because I fit the readership profile of the magazines under study. While I might arguably fall into the position of 'resisting reader', someone who questions the Myths on which the magazine texts are based, and resists reading those texts without challenging those Myths (see Thwaites et al, 2002:91), at other times my interpretation might highlight the point that I, too, am constrained in my analysis by the Myths of Ageing, both as an analyst and as a reader.

A reflexive approach will also occur in Chapter 8, in which I analyse some extracts from the data I have gathered in the semi-structured interviews that I carried out with women magazine readers. It is within this chapter that my presence as researcher is most explicit: each interview is a dialogue between myself and an informant. Therefore, my role can be subject to the analytical process as well, both in terms of my participation in the speech event and my interpretation of it.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I set out a framework for analysis of both text and talk. As I have detailed elsewhere, the purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which a particular type of media text, women's magazines, present meanings to their readers in relation to age and ageing. Readers may interpret the texts in their own way, but what I aim to show is that it is the meaning systems that are available to members of our culture which structure the types of meanings and interpretations readers take from texts (Tolson,1996:xiv). Moreover, media texts (and, indeed, all texts) are understood by their interrelationship with other texts and it is this multiple knowledge of other texts which is instrumental in creating meaning for the reader. This is called 'intertextuality'. In reading a magazine article about a particular personality or topic, for example, it is likely that the reader will also have access to other texts, written, spoken or visual, about either the personality or the topic (see Tolson, ibid:xiv)

Media texts can be analysed in any number of ways, depending on the background of the analyst and the framework they consequently choose to work with. An analysis is likely to involve a multidisciplinary approach, crossing between, inter alia, the fields of linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies and social theory. This is because of the multimodal nature of many media texts and because a multidisciplinary approach allows us to give a more holistic and persuasive interpretation. This study draws on concepts from the disciplines I have mentioned, with an emphasis on linguistic and semiotic theory, knitting the strands together into a framework which could loosely be defined as a critical discourse analytical framework. This particular framework can be applied to texts whether written, spoken or visual.

A theoretical framework is like a toolkit…

It is fashionable among analysts to use the metaphor of a toolkit to describe the tools or concepts with which they choose to work (see, for example, Threadgold, 2003; Martin & Rose, 2003:21). To extend the metaphor further, a builder who is constructing a house, or working on any other building project, will make use of a collection of tools such as hammers, drills, saws and chisels, depending on which one is appropriate to the particular task in hand. The builder will exchange one tool for another, depending on the stage of work they are at, until the task is completed. In the same way, the discourse analyst will make use of a reserve of conceptual tools to complete their task. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to list an inventory of tools in the toolbox and to describe their usefulness. The builder's construction is tangible and real; mine is theoretical and abstract, but both must be suitable and appropriate for their purpose and be able to stand up to the scrutiny (and assessment) of others. Let us start, then, by considering the term 'discourse', as it is a term which has more than one meaning, depending on who is using it and for what purpose.

Discourse

'Discourse' is a term commonly used across many academic disciplines (for example, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, psychology), but is often left undefined as if its meaning is self-evident (Mills, 1997:1). Indeed, Widdowson (1995:158) is critical of its use, believing it to be a term fashionably and widely used, often unreflectively. Within each discipline there is what Mills (1997:3) refers to as much 'fluidity' surrounding the term, and attempts to pinpoint its meaning highlight this. It becomes evident, therefore, that to try to define

'discourse' is problematic, not least because this involves ignoring the fact that it is a major cross-disciplinary theme (Fairclough, 1996:53).

Jaworski & Coupland (1999:3) sum up various definitions of 'discourse' by stating that those definitions consistently emphasise 'language in use', but that 'discourse' is also concerned with what is beyond language, that is the non-linguistic. We need, therefore, to consider the multimodality of what is being analysed. In addition, Chandler (2004) describes 'discourse' as a system of representation, a way of constructing reality within a particular ontological domain. This position emphasises its topic-bound nature. Thwaites et al (2002:140) extend this idea further and consider 'discourse' to be a cluster of textual arrangements which helps to control the identities and actions of those who are part of a social institution. In other words, discourse creates and transmits social and institutional ideologies (Wales, 2001:114).

Critical Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CL is an approach pioneered by Roger Fowler and his colleagues at the University of East Anglia. In a seminal account entitled *Language and Control* (Fowler, et al, 1979) they demonstrate the intrinsic connection between language use and social structure. Furthermore, they contend that people's world-view is connected to their relationship to societal institutions, and is mediated by language use which is ideologically based (Fowler & Kress, 1979:185). The word 'critical' to describe this type of linguistic analysis is founded on the premise that much social meaning is implicitly rather than explicitly expressed (Fowler & Kress, ibid:196). This is not to say that people consciously use language opaquely, it is more a case of presupposing that ideology is naturalized and invisible and a critical approach to language can highlight this (Wales, 2001:91).

CDA is sometimes used as an umbrella term to describe both CL and CDA (Wales, 2001:91) and differences between the two are not always clear-cut. CDA and discourse analysis more generally have been adopted by many academic disciplines, as well as linguistics. CDA is not, therefore, one single method of discourse analysis; its methodologies vary (Wodak, 2001:3). Indeed, Fairclough & Wodak (1997:262-268) list eight approaches to CDA. These include, for example, Fairclough's approach, which is concerned with sociocultural change and discursive change and focuses on, inter alia, institutional texts, such as public service texts, or Van Dijk's approach which is described as socio-cognitive. He has focussed on ethnic and racial issues, news reporting and issues connected to the abuse of power. Wodak, on the other hand, is associated with what is known as a Discourse Historical Method and has analysed anti-Semitic discourses in Austria. It is historical in the sense that all available background information is interwoven into the analysis. These three examples serve to highlight the range of issues and phenomena CDA in its many forms is concerned with. It also illustrates that CDA more accurately describes an approach, which is often interdisciplinary, taking as its starting point the view that language is a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2001:19).

As is evident above, CDA focuses on social problems and is especially concerned with power relations, which are essentially relations of difference (Wodak, 2001:11), and analysts often take the side of those who are dominated and oppressed (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:259). As Wodak (2001) points out, however, power does not come from language, rather language indexes power. Moreover, what is left out of a text can be as important as what is included (Van Dijk, 2001:106). Thus, there may be beliefs that are not explicitly stated, presupposed

by the author to be held by readers. Critical analysis can determine what has been omitted as well as included, what is implicit as well as explicit is a way, therefore, of unearthing inequalities of power. Fairclough & Wodak (1997:277) stress that CDA is also concerned with understanding sociocultural processes and linking them to the analysis of a text. As they point out, discourses are always connected to other discourses, both diachronically and synchronically. Thus, any text is always intertextually linked to other texts, its intertexts (Thwaites et al, 2002:96).

As has been noted, critical discourse analysis cannot be described as a single method: it is more of an approach to an analysis; a framework will often be individually created by the analyst to suit the task in hand, as the framework in this thesis has been. Discourse analysis acknowledges that language forms part of a wider framework connected to thought, experience, culture and society. It is therefore necessary to move beyond aspects of language such as phonology, syntax and grammar, to consider a more socially based view of language (Matheson, 2005:3). This view is based on Halliday's (1994) concept of language and this is one which many discourse analytical approaches subscribe to (see Wodak, 2001:8). Halliday (1994:179) considered language as consisting of three continuously interconnected metafunctions: the ideational, where language structures experience; the interpersonal, which describes participant relations; and the textual, which is concerned with the coherence and cohesion of a text. My analysis involves outlining how the experiential is reflected in language use, describing the relationship between readers, writers and those referred to in each article and demonstrating the ways in which the text 'makes sense' as a whole. To assist with this task, I also keep Fairclough's (1995:60) three stage framework for discourse analysis in mind. This model goes beyond the level of considering the text in isolation, although the text is, of course, the central concern. Any text is produced according to the

discourse practices that surround it. Here we can consider institutional aspects such as editing and revision and also how and in what way media texts are read or consumed. These aspects need to be considered within the wider context of the sociocultural conditions operating at any particular historical moment which will both constrain and enable what is being represented and the way it is read and interpreted. This leads me to consider discourse in the Foucauldian sense, which departs quite substantially from some of those that I have outlined thus far.

Foucault and discourse

For Foucault, discourse is that which enables but at the same time constrains the way we write, speak or think about a particular phenomenon in any historical moment (see McHoul & Grace, 1993:31). Discourse does not mean simply 'language', rather it is 'a system which structures the way that we perceive reality' (Mills, 2003:55). It is a system of representation in place in a particular era (see Hall, 2001:73). Foucault considered that it is discourse that produces knowledge, rather than those who create texts, either written or spoken. Texts can only be created within the boundaries of the episteme and the discursive formations which constrain them. 'Episteme' describes ways of conceptualising that which we know at a particular moment and this knowledge will be apparent at many institutional sites:

> This episteme may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms...a certain structure of thought that men of the same period cannot escape... (Foucault, 2002:211)

'Discursive formations' describe the sorts of statements which are said or written about particular institutional sites which influence the way people think. Although they appear to be quite fixed, they are subject to continual change (Mills, 2003:64).

It is possible to operationalise Foucaudian interpretations of discourse in tandem with those interpretations utilised within sociolinguistics. Indeed, Faircough (1995) has been heavily influenced by Foucault and his aim is to fuse 'discourse as social interaction and interaction, people interacting together in real social situations' which, he argues is linked to the interpersonal metafunction of language with discourse 'as a form of knowledge' which he claims is linked to the ideational metafunction (ibid:18). Fairclough (1995:19) argues that his analysis of media texts takes place within the wider context of discourse and sociocultural practices. Within his own book on media language, however, he concentrates on the linguistic rather than the semiotic, whereas my own analysis takes account of both, and is framed quite substantially within semiotics as I will show.

My analysis is influenced to an extent, although not exclusively, by this conception of discourse. Particularly relevant is the idea that we are bound by the ways in which we can think about or talk about the sociocultural aspects of the ageing process. That is not to say we are unable to challenge 'obvious truths' or to put forward alternative viewpoints. But we are only able to do so within the limits that we are constrained by in this historical moment. These limits are grounded in, for example, medical knowledge about the biological ageing process and social knowledge about the effects the biological processes give rise to. Moreover, because ageing and the way it is conceived of as a process of decline always has 'the death card up its sleeve' (Gullette, 2004:107), we are constrained in a very finite and limited way as to how much 'positivity' can be associated even with the so-called new versions of ageing that we come across in media texts, such as women's magazines, some of which I will discuss in this thesis.

Media texts

Media texts are all-pervasive in Western cultures. It is hard to envisage a way of life that does not involve them to some degree: indeed, it would take a great deal of effort to avoid them. We are, for example, subject to vast amounts of advertising in our daily lives, which is impossible to ignore. The majority of people have ready access to magazines and newspapers, watch television to a greater or lesser extent and watch films, either in the cinema, or at home on DVD. And of course, there is the internet. Cost is not a central issue as public libraries stock many forms of media texts that are freely lent. Media texts are available, therefore, at many sites, and their influence is undisputed. The fact that the phenomenon of the media can be studied as an academic discipline suggests that we are accepting the level of media saturation to which we are exposed, and trying to understand it (Tolson, 1996:i).

Within a framework dedicated to an understanding of media texts, a significant component must involve suitable tools for the understanding and interpretation of visual images. As Fairclough (1995:59) states, it is fundamental to understand how photographs and other visual images interact with what is written or spoken about to create meaning. Sometimes it is possible to use the same tools and concepts in an analysis of talk, writing or visual images. Figurative language, such as the concept of metonymy, is an example of a tool which can be applied to all the texts, whether visual, written or spoken that I analyse and is discussed later in this chapter. We can also refer directly to semiotic theory and in this study I draw particularly on the work of Roland Barthes, although I make mention of other scholars in the field such as Van Leeuwen (2005) and Hodge & Kress (1988).

Barthes (1972, 1977) was instrumental in applying what is essentially a structuralist account of language to texts other than those that are written, or to those that consist of both writing and images, for example, magazine texts, advertisements, sports events, dress (clothes that people wear) and television. These are all texts which can be labelled as popular culture. By redefining and adapting a Saussurian model of language, Barthes provides a framework which one can apply in order to analyse artefacts of popular culture. As Saussure's model plays a key role in Barthess's theories, I first outline some fundamental points from it.

Saussure and the sign

For Saussure (1983), elements of the language system (called *signs*) can be divided into two parts: the name we have for something in our culture and the concept that name or word produces. Thus, any sign is made up of a *signifier* (the name/word) and the *signified* (what the signifier invokes). The relationship between signifier and signified is called signification (see Thwaites et al, 2002:31) and it is an *arbitrary* relationship. This means there is no particular reason why a 'cow' should be called a 'cow' (and, indeed, in languages other than English, an alternative signifier is used to denote the four legged creature English speakers know as a 'cow'). Signs take their meaning from their relationship to other signs in the (language) system, in other words, because of what they are not rather than what they are. It is the difference between signs that produces their meaning. If you were, for example, trying to teach someone from another culture about the word used to describe a particular colour (say, brown) the only way they would learn would be by being able to distinguish it from other colours (say, red, tan, yellow and so on); they would not understand what brown is unless they could also understand what it was not (Culler, 1976:25).

The meaning of signs is, however, not completely and irrevocably fixed: changes can occur in meaning perhaps if a new sign becomes part of the language system. Take the term 'mid life' which has been used in the last fifteen years to describe adults who could also be categorised as 'middle aged' (that is, around forty to sixty years). The introduction and use of this new term allows the term 'middle aged' to retain the negative connotations associated with this time of life. The new term ('mid life') carries more positive connotations, perhaps describing those who subscribe to similar lifestyles and values as younger age groups, irrespective of their chronological age. 'Middle aged' is not only a more 'old-fashioned' term in current times, but it carries with it values of old-fashioned-ness. We could also suggest that the term 'middle aged' has undergone a process of perjoration because in some (social) contexts it carries additional (negative) meanings other than its base meaning.

This last point is key to understanding the way the analysis of texts works in this project, because the analysis is underpinned by the idea of transition or flux in the roles and identities of older women in Western societies today. It is important to recognise, however, that although the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary as far as a particular language is concerned, within individual cultures there are specific links between codes and ideologies which bind particular signifiers with particular signifieds. It isn't possible to understand signs on their own; it is how they fit together with other signs within a particular language system that makes them understandable (Strinati, 2004:82).

Denotation, Connotation and Myth

Barthes (1972) reworks Sausurre's model of signifier and signified and adds another level of signification to it: connotation. At the primary level of signification there is denotation which

is : '…routinely treated as the definitional, literal, obvious or common-sense meaning of a sign, but semioticians tend to treat it as a signified about which there is a broad *consensus*' (Chandler, 2007:248), emphasis in original). Connotation, by contrast, is: 'The socio-cultural and personal associations produced as a reader decodes a text.' (ibid:246). Barthes (1972:111) describes connotation as the secondary level of signification. Keeping in mind Chandler's summary of the two concepts, let's see how Barthes' levels of signification work, using his most famous example:

> I am at the barber's and a copy of Paris-Match is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (Barthes, 1972:112).

At the first level of signification, at the denotational level, the photograph is simply of a young Negro soldier, saluting (very possibly) the French flag. At the second level of signification this image signifies the power of France and French colonialism. This is foregrounded as positive and inclusive as the *Negro* is a key part of this meaning, even though those the *Negro* would be fighting against in Algeria would be black (or *Negro*) as well. It is the connotations associated with the image of the French *Negro* soldier (that France is a great but inclusive power, which attracts loyalty from its citizens and does not discriminate between them on grounds of colour) that perpetuate what Barthes describes as the myths upon which the image is based. As Barker & Galasínski (2001:5) put it:

> Connotations which have become…accepted as 'normal' and 'natural' are described by Barthes as myths. These act as conceptual maps of meaning through which to make sense of the world and turn cultural constructions into pre-given universal truths…Myths work by naturalizing culturally contingent codes into unchallengeable commonsense.

Barthes's analysis of the cover of *Paris-Match* is also a good example of how media texts and, consequently, their analysis, are both culturally and historically specific. Barthes's analysis is underpinned by the collapse of French colonial power and the ongoing war between France and its Algerian colony, a 'fact' which readers of *Paris-Match* in 1957 would be aware of. This is a fact which Barthes himself does not, therefore, need to make explicit and we can use this observation to draw attention to the assumption of cultural knowledge required for the reading of such an analysis.

A semiotic analysis of a similar cover, some fifty years later, whether in France or in another country, would be less likely to draw such specific attention to the race of the soldier or to racial issues. This is because colonial policies have been superseded by other political scenarios; while racism is still prevalent, institutionally and within societies generally, many people of all racial backgrounds routinely serve within the armed forces or in public service occupations. Notice also how Barthes (1972:112) uses the words that all France's 'sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag' whereas I (in 2008) have written: 'many people of all racial backgrounds routinely serve within the armed forces...' In 1957 the assumption that only men would or could fight wars would have been unquestioned in most Western cultures. Moreover, the French State appears not to discriminate on grounds of race (Barthes uses the term *colour*) and this is highlighted by Barthes to show that the possibility of racial (colour) discrimination was very real, especially in the context of that particular war. Today, both assumptions (about gender and race in the armed services) would be considered by many readers (certainly in a UK context) as inappropriate and my wording reflects that. The sentence, 'many people of all racial backgrounds routinely serve within the armed forces or in public service occupations', appears to challenge the idea of institutional gender and racial discrimination by choosing words and phrases which show a

now taken-for-granted inclusivity. By contrast, in Barthes's day, racial and gender equality were not necessarily supported by the masses, or reinforced by state legislature, as they are today in most Western societies. The myth which my sentence draws on is something like: 'All people, no matter what their gender or racial background, have equal employment opportunities that are protected by law'.

When discussing the concept of 'myth', it is important to recognise that it is not being used in some of its more widespread senses. Myth used to describe a fable or a 'fabulous narration', and then later, from the 19th century, it came to mean something not to be trusted and something that was deceptive. This usage has remained (Williams, 1976:177). However, for Barthes, it has a somewhat different meaning. It is being used to describe something that is 'common' and 'obvious' in our culture. 'Myth' underpins the way we talk and makes that way seem 'obvious' and 'natural'. In fact, it is so persistent and ingrained that it becomes the *only* way and so structures our thinking.

By promoting a culture of 'equality as natural, normal and obvious' this view becomes the 'only way' to frame, think about or to discuss the world. This is despite the fact that, even today, there will be those who continue to subscribe to a view that only men should fight wars and that only those of a particular race can claim legitimate ties to a particular nation or state. Myth is thus a process of 'overturning culture into nature' (Barthes, 1977:165). What begins as a sociocultural construction becomes 'a matter of course' (Barthes, ibid).

Myth is not only instrumental in enabling meanings to appear 'natural', rather than cultural, but is also a place where struggles for meaning occur (Thwaites et al 2002:69). If we return to issues of equality, and the way Barthes (1972:112) has framed the idea, 'that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag', we can see that it is possible that a questioning of 'colour discrimination' as 'normal' behaviour was perhaps starting to occur in the late 1950s in France. This would therefore explain Barthes's overt reference to it in response to *Paris-Match's* cover, which both supports and challenges acceptance of a colour discriminatory point of view (which currently might be termed a racist ideology). Myth as a site of struggle is therefore a highly relevant concept when identifying what might be termed as an ideological shift, and the transitional period that precedes it. This thesis is underpinned by the idea that there is shift in the meanings of what it is to be older, and what it is possible to be when one is older in late modern Western societies (see Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991). Moreover, I will show that what I refer to as the 'Myths of Ageing' provide the foundations upon which the media representations I discuss are built. I have identified three myths and these are:

- that ageing is a decline scenario: it involves both mental and physical decline;
- that ageing is synonymous with loss of power: sexual, economic and social; and
- ageing must be resisted.

These describe the basis on which we currently think about, talk about or describe ageing in Western societies. And myth is 'conveyed by a discourse' (Barthes, 1972:109). Moreover, it is not only written or spoken discourse that can convey what Barthes terms as 'mythical

speech' (ibid:109). He also mentions other modes of representation such as photographs, films, advertising and sports (Barthes, 1972:109).

Anchorage and relay

Barthes also provides us with further tools for understanding how we make sense of photographs and images, particularly those that are interspersed with or are part of linguistic texts. Images are anchored by the linguistic cues that accompany them. So we read and understand an image or a photograph in a particular way because we are directed to do so by the caption it has, by the text that surrounds it and (if applicable) the publication it forms part of. The image or photograph is 'anchored' so that it suggests a particular meaning or message from the range of meanings or connotations that are possible for any image. Using examples from various texts, including an advertisement for Italian pasta, Barthes (1977:38-39) makes the point that, because 'all images are polysemous' and could mean several things to the reader or viewer, the purpose of the text is to direct the reader 'through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others…' (1977:40). Anchorage is thus a form of control which has a 'repressive value' (1977:40) and its purpose will be to stabilise the meaning of images and other visual cues according to the cultural myths they are based on. A way to consider the concept of anchorage can be to take an image or photograph and assign a number of different captions or headings to it. In so doing, the analyst can distance himself or herself from the text that is being considered and observe how different readings are possible, not because of the image itself, but because of the work of the linguistic cues with which the image is surrounded.

The implications of anchorage are that we 'read' the images in women's magazines in particular ways; that they have a limited range of meanings. Moreover, we can also make use of Barthes's (1977:41) related concept, *relay*, to describe the idea of a two-way, reciprocal process, whereby image and the surrounding written text or caption reinforce one another. A key task in the analysis of the media articles chosen for this study is to closely examine the relationship between the images and the linguistic texts to try to determine the interrelationship between them and how a reader can construct meaning by the way they are presented.

The Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Axes

Another way to consider how meaning is created in any text, whether image, photograph or linguistic, is to analyse the relationship between the signs that have been combined horizontally (along the syntagmatic axis) and those that have been selected vertically (the paradigmatic axis, see Saussure, 1983). The syntagmatic axis is the combination of one sign with another and the next one and so on; the paradigmatic axis involves the choice of one sign instead of another. Items are selected on the paradigmatic axis and combined along the syntagmatic axis following rules and conventions (according to the language which is used, whether it is a verbal or a visual text). Meaning can be altered along the syntagmatic axis by choosing alternative signs along the paradigmatic or vertical axis. The choices along the vertical axis are made from a set of signs (the paradigm) that are possible in any given context (see Thwaites et al, 2002:43). The syntagmatic axis is linear and irreversible (Barthes, 1967:58), and the terms or signs that are present along this axis work with the others that are present to create meaning.

Along the vertical, or paradigmatic axis, however, the terms and signs 'are united in absentia' (Barthes, 1967:59): meaning is created as much by the signs which have been left out (and our awareness of those that are missing) as the ones which have been chosen. If we take a statement such as: 'A magazine for grown-up women', we could first of all change the order of the phrase. For example, 'This is a grown-up magazine for women' alters the meaning slightly, while: 'This is a grown up for magazine women' doesn't make sense at all. Next, we could try substituting 'publication' or 'glossy' for 'magazine', which results in very little change in meaning from the original sentence. If, however, we substitute 'video', 'film' or even 'book', the sentence still 'makes sense' along the syntagmatic axis, but the meaning alters somewhat, because the substitution is further away from the original paradigm set (*monthly periodicals*). If, on the other hand, we substitute 'old' for 'grown-up', the sentence still makes sense and, moreover, the substitution comes from the same paradigm set (*people who are no longer young*). We could even argue that there are similarities in meaning between 'grown-up' and 'old'. There are, however, many more negative connotations associated with the term 'old' than there are with 'grown-up', especially in the context of older women and the magazines that are targeted at them.

We can assess the cultural myths that are in play by considering the paradigm set and looking at what *has* been chosen and what has *not* been chosen. Another way to think about the syntagmatic/paradigmatic contrast is in terms of intratextuality and intertextuality. The syntagmatic axis concerns intratextuality as it links to other signifiers that also occur within any given text; the paradigmatic axis alludes intertextually to those signifiers that could have been used but were not (Chandler, 2007:84). Barthes (1967:65-66) discusses the use of the commutation test. Substituting a different signifier allows the analyst to test what effect the alternative has on whatever is being signified, how the chosen elements have been combined

to form the syntagm and, thus, importantly, classification of the paradigm set becomes possible. The analysis might be more difficult to describe for a system other than a language system (Barthes, 1967:66) but careful observation will usually allow the analyst to learn which signifieds or signs are present in whatever system is being analysed, whether written, spoken or visual.

Barthes: a critical view

In an analysis of Barthes's approach, Strinati (2004:110-114) has made several key criticisms which I will attempt to address here. The major issue is one of validity: how can we assess that the interpretation that Barthes (or any analyst who makes use of Barthes' theories) places on any cultural item be validated? There does not appear to be any reason cited by Barthes (according to Strinati, ibid) as to the choices behind his interpretations. However, as Tolson (1996:3) reminds us, it is true that meaning is something unique and individual. It is as diverse as we all are, and we make our own interpretations. It is also the case, however, that certain interpretations are likely to predominate. As Tolson (ibid:3) puts it: '…what happens in our heads is, if not entirely predictable, at least to a large extent common and conventional'. This is likely despite the fact that we consider ourselves to be original in our thought processes. It is inevitable that, as members of any given society, we all draw on the dominant myths of our time. On the one hand this allows us to think in unique ways; but on the other hand, we are bound by the ways of thinking and being that are circulating within society at any particular moment and these are repeated endlessly across many media. The 'sheer weight of repetition' (Thwaites et al, 2002:153) is a significant factor in influencing our interpretations: in women's magazines for example, similar types of articles and the topics are constantly repeated and in this way, particular social values, beliefs and social

identities come to be legitimised and naturalised and applicable to all, so deeply entrenched in our culture that they resist an oppositional viewpoint and change.

Part of the methodological approach taken in this study has been to interview women magazine readers to access their interpretations of what they are reading and seeing. Complementing the primary data (the magazine texts) in this way has allowed me to find out whether my analysis is supported by the responses of readers. Moreover, by including an analysis of reader responses, I also aim to address an identified weakness of some discourse analysis studies: that they do not often include an audience/reader response component (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). An additional benefit of this approach is that I will be analysing data from two sources, which will enable me to cross-check or triangulate my results (Bryman, 2004:275) thereby lending validity to my interpretations as analyst. I turn now to consider some theoretical points relating to women's magazines specifically, as these are the primary texts which are analysed.

Women's magazines

When glossy magazines are categorised for analysis, divisions are often made between teenage magazines, adult (heterosexual) women's magazines and, more recently, men's lifestyle magazines. It is noticeable that, within the second category (the one I am concerned with here), there is an emphasis on those magazines that are aimed at younger adult age groups, for example, titles such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Red*, rather than titles aimed at the mid-life woman, such as *Woman & Home* or *Good Housekeeping*. It is possible that this omission has nothing to do with ageism on the part of the researchers; many of the observations and conclusions made about the women's titles that have been studied in some detail (see below)

are applicable to the titles I deal with in this thesis. After all, there are many similarities in overall style, content and advertising.

On the other hand, it is surprising that the titles I have used for research have not been selected as often in the past given that the demographics in Western societies is weighted heavily towards 35+ age group. This must include not only the magazine readers themselves, but those who study them. Much of the theory that has derived from studies into women's magazines has not concentrated so much on the mid-life or older age and its representations. It seems important, therefore, to test whether existing theoretical positions (such as those which concern stereotypes or reader positioning) are relevant when age is the variable.

Stereotyping in women's magazines

A key theoretical concept which is applied in my analysis is that of stereotyping and how it features in women's magazines. As Allport (1979:191) puts it:

> Whether favourable or unfavourable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category.

According to Perkins (1996:22), stereotypes sidestep critical thinking. Very often, we accept them if they relate to areas in which we have limited knowledge, as this makes it more likely, that we will allow ourselves to 'short-circuit' critical thinking (ibid:22). Their defining feature is that they appear to be commonsense. Stereotypes are very effective: people measure themselves against the various stereotypes which they are presented with, and in this

way those stereotypes become reinforced. Perkins makes the point that stereotypes '...are both (apparently) true and (really) false at the same time....'(1996:22). The falseness extends to the ways which stereotypes describe groups in ways which obscure the real reason behind that group's attributes and because they are 'selective descriptions' (ibid:22) of things that are highly significant or problematic about that group, they are exaggerations. Importantly, stereotypical characteristics of a group are presented as 'natural': this is not so much a feature of stereotyping as such but it shows that stereotyping is ideological (1996:23).

But while a stereotype might not necessarily be a negative portrayal, the attitudes that it creates are negative, as Itzin (1986) demonstrates by the conclusions she draws from her study. Her research was conducted into *Woman* magazine over a six month period in 1983, Itzin argues that women of all ages were presented with: '…combined messages of ageism and sexism…' (1986:127). There was an emphasis, for example, on keeping youthful and fit (rather than simply fit). Moreover, there was a general, underlying message that older women were not useful, except possibly as grandmothers, and that they were always subordinate to men. Topics connected with age were a recurrent feature in almost every issue Itzin studied, and these were largely devoted to how to avoid its visible signs. Itzin (ibid) refers to articles about famous older people who still looked good, even though it was implied they are really too old to do so. They were presented as exceptions rather than the norm. In the contemporary magazines that are the subject of this study, there was a similar, but much more overt, emphasis on celebrities dealing with the ageing process. They are no longer viewed as being unusual as they might have been in 1983; it is more a case of how older women can strive to be like them.

Itzin (1986:128) argues that the attitudes expressed in *Woman* magazine were underpinned by stereotypes which systematically misrepresent women and the types of behaviour expected from them and the roles they are expected to conform to. Stereotypes, she argues, use only certain exaggerated and negative characteristics of whoever is being represented and they make use of only partial information:

> Basically, a stereotype represents a set of ideas or a set of beliefs about people – an ideology – rather than people as they are. Stereotypes are deliberately misleading; they perform the function of creating attitudes which, by their very nature, are negative attitudes. (Itzin, 1986:128)

While Allport (1979:1) has made the point that stereotyping may be favourable as well as unfavourable, Itzin (op.cit) is concerned with the negative attitudes (as she saw it) expressed in the magazines that she studied. These were that women have two principal roles which involve children: a sexual role and a domestic role both of which involve service and availability to men. Once women are in the mid-forties, however, both these roles are accomplished and they are no longer useful. Itzin's (1986) research and her conclusions have allowed me to assess whether the same (or similar) messages are being given via women's magazines some twenty five years later. In other words, are there still stereotypes, several decades later, and, if so, had they changed at all in the intervening years? An assessment can then be made as to the durability of the cultural representations of women growing older, and whether the myths on which those representations are based have changed to any degree, in line with the changing nature of women's magazines themselves.

In the years following Itzin's research, women's magazines have undergone some changes in content. Gill (2007:184) notes that there has been a substantial increase in features focussing

on celebrity culture and lifestyles; a dramatic 'sexualization of the body' which has its foundations in the beauty industry; a growing 'adoption of feminist registers or discourses' emphasising control and self-satisfaction. Work outside the home is also foregrounded with its related problems of managing a busy lifestyle, involving children, home maintenance, socialising and so on. Heterosexual relationships are foregrounded. Women's magazines emphasise individualistic attributes, and personal problem-solving rather than a desire for a collective social and class struggle. Moreover, they are: 'also structured by implicit exclusions relating to age, '"race"', sexuality and class…' (Gill, 2007:183).

These changes come under the umbrella of 'liberal media strategies' (van Zoonen, 1991:36-37), brought about by a liberal feminist discourse which is concerned with accounting for the inequality caused by stereotypical roles assigned to women in society which result in their subordinate societal position. A liberal feminist media analysis concentrates on stereotypes of women, for example, as natural mothers (van Zoonen, 1991:35). Gender role stereotyping is reinforced by the media, not only because of commercial interests, but because of the dominant social values they mirror and because male media producers subscribe to these values (van Zoonen, 1991:36). But there is now a new stereotype of 'Superwoman' created for commercial purposes as a way of responding to the demands of liberal feminism. Older age seems to be accounted for within the existing 'Superwoman' stereotype, most notably in the monthly publications I study, where there are many representations of glamorous, successful older women, as I will show. These are women who are depicted as having status in both the public and private spheres of their lives, women who have achieved much and continue to do so now they are older. There are also somewhat different or modified stereotypes from those that Itzin came across in 1986 that are being drawn out in the weekly publications too. For example, in Chapter 7, I discuss a representation of an older woman,

who is not particularly glamorous or successful in her career. To a certain extent she represents a stereotype of a somewhat more traditional woman who is centred very much around the home but, nevertheless, she can be judged as having achieved some success because she is involved with a much younger man.

Thus, there have indeed been some changes in the way women's magazines are structured and the emphasis they place on various aspects and tasks connected to a woman's lifestyle. These support Ballaster et al's (1996:88) observations concerning the variation in the 'shared version of femininity' depicted in the magazines across time, reflecting the 'instability and non-viability of the versions of female self-hood offered at different points in the history of the magazine' (ibid:88). Here, they are referring to the complex and contradictory aspects of the representations in women's magazine. Although there are ideals to aspire to, women's lives are presented as involving many 'problems' with the magazine providing the solution to some of them. This raises the issue of how magazine readers are positioned by the texts they are reading.

Reader positioning and women's magazines

Ballaster et al (1996:87) discuss the intimate tone adopted in women's magazines where readers are addressed as if they are close friends (this has also been demonstrated by Talbot, 1995): there is an emphasis on what women share with one another by being women, something that transcends relations of difference, for example, racial background. The collective voice of shared experience extends to include both the text producers (for example, editors and publishers) as well as readers in, for example, the 'real life' genres. The overall

message is the foregrounding of magazine producers and readers as a homogenous group, which is not the case as the 'implied' reader 'is self-evidently middle-class, white and heterosexual' (Ballaster et al, 1996:88), and it is likely the media producers are too. All women's magazines represent women centred in, or very close to, the home, physically and experientially, although there is some variation as to whether women are encouraged to pursue a career (as well as maintaining a home) or not (ibid:90). Fundamentally, however, Ballaster et al (1996:91) make the observation that:

> Ours and others' readings of magazines crucially shows the discourse of gender that structures the genre to be intertwined with those of race, class, nation and age. Magazines acknowledge or construct social class differences in terms of 'lifestyle' or consumption, but consistently deny the existence of structured class or race conflict, offering only personal or moral resolutions to problems proceeding from these stratifications.

What I take from this, which I consider to be relevant to this study, is that differences between women are more or less ignored: they are considered a unitary group for the purposes of the magazine, with shared ideologies and goals. And what I am particularly concerned with is testing the claims relating to the way in which readers are addressed as friends or as one group in the publications under study, particularly in relation to their age. One of the ways to do this is to consider the 'implied' reader of the texts under study (a point referred to briefly by Ballaster et al) and how the reader is positioned by the texts she is reading. A fundamental aspect to consider in the process of reader positioning is the front cover of the magazine, because it is this that readers are drawn to in their choice of what to read. This became evident to me in an interview I conducted with one of my informants and is discussed in Chapter 8.

McCracken's (1996) work includes a commentary on the role of the magazine cover, as an important, distinguishing feature which labels not only the magazine, but the women who buy it. Covers attempt to identify an 'idealized reader image of the group advertisers seek to reach' (ibid, 1996:97). This is achieved by an image of a woman, usually smiling, with an expression, make-up, clothes and pose which implies the existence of a male. The cover also includes linguistic text, detailing the main contents of the magazine. Although what McCracken (ibid:99) refers to as 'genre identity' is fundamental to both the readership and whether the magazine sells, it also has the effect of positioning readers ideologically. Drawing on Berger (1972), she describes how readers may feel inferior (and indeed there is the intention that they should do so), but this is because they envy themselves as they will be in the future after they have bought and made use of the product, in this case, the magazine. Women must work to become perfect like the woman on the cover. As McCracken (1996:100) puts it:

> The cover functions as an interpretive lens for what follows…Syntax, tone, color, visual images of ideal beauty and success, covert images of consumption work to position us favourably to the magazine's content…

The cover functions, then, as a cultural signifier, advertising the magazine in its various roles. Its chief purpose is to sell itself by playing on the anxieties, dreams, aspirations and insecurities of its potential readership. For my own study, McCracken's work is quite crucial because the monthly magazines, in particular, almost always feature mid-life celebrities as their cover model and there is every possibility that it is these role models that older women magazine readers aspire to be.

Feminist Stylistics

In order to proceed in a systematic manner with a linguistic and semiotic analysis involving women, it is worth taking account of some aspects of a framework that has been very influential in detailing the salient points to be aware of in texts concerning women, including media texts.

Sara Mills (1995) has detailed a feminist framework towards analysing the way in which gender is represented in various genres. She maps out a multidisciplinary framework, underpinned by stylistic theory, which includes a consideration of reader positioning and the relevance of gender in this context. She includes the work of Althusser (1971) who is concerned with the way in which people recognise themselves and their position within society (Mills, 1995:67). We can consider the term 'subject' to be important here: because this recognition involves not only the 'you' as an individual person, but also the 'you' that is subject, or subordinate to authority. One way to recognise yourself and your position can involve what Althusser calls 'interpellation' or 'hailing'. The famous (imaginary) example is given of someone walking along a street who hears a policeman shouting: 'Hey, you there!' The person may turn around in response to the call in case they are being addressed. Thus, they are 'interpellated' because in the act of responding they become the 'you' of the policeman's call (Althusser, ibid). The obvious criticism is (as Mills, 1995:68 notes) that there is clearly a lot more involved in the process of 'interpellation'. Nevertheless, it is a useful way of considering one very direct way (the use of personal pronouns) in which readers of any text can assume a number of roles, for example, being part of a group ('we'), being the addressee of the text ('you'), or being someone who is distant from whatever group is being referred to ('they'; 'them'). An additional element is the idea that any text contains

components which makes its message seem ‘obvious’ and ‘commonsense’. The message is likely to be ideological, or based on a particular belief system. Mills (ibid:68) argues that readers are positioned by what she calls the ‘dominant reading’ and they are positioned whether or not they agree with what has been written.

Mills (ibid) is also concerned with more indirect forms of address. Here, she draws on Barthes (1977), who exemplifies how obviousness can be highlighted in texts by structures such as: ‘everyone knows that’ or ‘it is clear that’ making it difficult to disagree with whatever has been presented. Again, readers can very easily assume a role: they become those who subscribe to particular points of view, because information has been presented in a way that appears to be self-evidently true.

Implicit assumptions and presuppositions are other ways in which the reader is indirectly addressed as being a particular type of person. In addition, many texts aimed at women are constructed in terms of ‘obvious’ problems that women face, for which the text (perhaps an advertisement or self-help feature in a magazine) provides a solution (Mills, 1995:73). This may encourage the reader to accept a set of cultural beliefs or ideologies as ‘the way things are’. Mills (ibid) reminds us that the dominant reading has nothing to do with what the author may have intended: we cannot recover authorial intention, thus it is irrelevant. The dominant reading concerns the reading positions that are possible for any reader in any historical moment, during which time particular myths and ideologies exist and they underpin whatever has been written, depicted or described. Mills also makes the point that a reader’s understanding of any text will be dependent on other texts and discourses, in other words, the cultural knowledge that the reader brings with them when they encounter any text.

These points draw us back to Barthes (1977:148) once again, and the theory that writing is never original. Texts are made up of many different writings from many cultures and that meaning is located with the reader, rather than with the author. Barthes (ibid) argues that: 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but its destination'. The important entity which gives a text its meaning is the 'birth of the reader' and this is at the expense of the 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1977:148). Sense and meaning of any text lies only with the reader, who draws on their knowledge of other texts and practices each time they engage with any representation they encounter, in any text or media text such as those in women's magazines. What is useful to consider, however, is the idea that the representations that are encountered are often highly selective. The concept of metonymy can, therefore, assist in the unpacking or analytical process.

Metonymy

> Metaphor is a figure of speech based on similarity, whereas metonymy is based on contiguity. In metaphor you substitute something *like* the thing you mean for the thing itself, whereas in metonymy you substitute some attribute or cause or effect of the thing for the thing itself (David Lodge, *Nice Work*, 1989)

In Lodge's novel, Robin Penrose, a literary academic, is explaining the concepts of metaphor and metonymy to Vic Wilcox, a businessman, using the examples of the Silk Cut and Malboro cigarette advertisements from the 1980s. In interpreting our experience by the use of metaphor, we refer to something but describe it in terms of another, as Penrose tries to explain to Wilcox in the quote above. We *transfer* the qualities of whatever it is we want to describe onto something else. Metonymy, which also involves a process of substitution, works differently. Whenever we make use of metonymy, we substitute one signified for

another that is part of it in some way. Metonymy works by a process of *contiguity* (Chandler, 2007:129). Metonymy is not confined to a linguistic medium; it can be used to create or interpret meaning in images too (as in the cigarette advertisements referred to above).

Metonymy is an important tool analytically in at least two principal ways in this study. Firstly, it is crucial to understanding how cultural myths underpin and structure what is represented. Because myth is very selective, a dominant or key idea represents a whole system or way of doing things. The idea of selectivity or 'part for a whole' suggests that myth is functioning metonymically (see Thwaites et al, 2002:68-69 and my examples below).

Myth is very effective in persuading us that it is commonsense. It is often extremely easy to find examples which support particular myths as valid. For instance, in order to validate a myth such as 'ageing must be resisted', we can demonstrate this 'obviousness' by highlighting the 'fact' that younger people are more attractive and fit, have better health and opportunities both personally and professionally. Moreover, there are entire industries dedicated to enabling us to resist ageing, which are given legitimacy by state institutions promoting 'healthier' and 'happier' lifestyles. That such 'happiness' is only possible if one aligns oneself with the default position of fighting the battle against ageing or regarding youthfulness as an enviable category, can be ignored. To begin with, it is extremely hard to make a case for subscribing to a value system that idolises older age: there simply isn't one in our culture. So an entire 'way of doing things' is overcoded onto a single, dominant idea, which need not even be true: it just needs to be extremely selective (Thwaites et al, ibid).

In addition, and with reference to Perkins (1996), I have argued that stereotypes function by using a few attributes to define entities and groups. Stereotypes also rely on metonymy. Selective (and exaggerated) characteristics are made to stand for the idea, person or group of people that is being represented. The defining characteristics that are chosen make use of some qualities, or evaluations, while others are ignored. Stereotypes are, in fact, myths because they are metonymic. Groups are represented through a few attributes, usually negative, and there is an underlying theme of opposition in their construction (Thwaites et al, 2002:153). As I have detailed above, metonymy describes the process of substituting an attribute for whatever is being represented and this highlights its selectivity. Metonymy is intrinsic to many aspects of the analysis throughout this study because it is pervasive as I have demonstrated in my discussion of myth and stereotypes. I turn now to the final section of this chapter, in which I outline the theoretical foundation to the reflective analysis in this thesis.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a self-awareness involving an ongoing evaluation of the self within the research process (Finlay, 2002b:532). There are a number of perspectives detailing the necessity or otherwise for the inclusion of a reflexive component in one's research analysis (see, for example, collections such as Steier, 1991; Woolgar, 1988). The theories that underpin the concept or ideals of reflexivity involve the idea that it is impossible for the researcher to remain 'objective' and 'detached' from the research process. Moreover, it is questionable as to whether it is desirable that the researcher should try to do so, because they are clearly involved in it. This stance challenges a scientific and positivist position where 'I' is omitted from the research process both explicitly and implicitly. In current times, particularly within the social sciences, the inclusion of a consideration of one's own position within the research

process has become commonplace. The levels or degree to which reflexivity is included can vary according to the stance of the researcher and the theoretical framework they are adopting (see Finlay, 2002c). The idea of reflexivity refers to 'bending back on oneself' or a '…turning back of one's experience upon oneself' (Steier, 1991:2) with the point made that the 'self' is socially constructed. As Steier puts it: 'We are talking about a circular process, in which reflexivity is the guiding relationship allowing for the circularity' (ibid:2).

Reflexivity is practised within a number of theoretical frameworks including a social constructionist approach which emphasises (as I will do) the co-constituted nature of any account (see Finlay, 2002b:534). This foregrounds the inter relationship between researcher and what is being studied. Thinking about the primary data, that is the magazine texts, what I am concerned with is to highlight how such texts are structured so that they reproduce and reinforce particular values and cultural ideals concerning age and ageing. But I have to take into account my own position: I question how meanings are established by the texts because I am the analyst of these texts and also because I am, in Althusser's (1971) terms, both subject and subjected to. I am the 'you' these texts hail because I fit the readership profile for the magazines under study. In other words, I am subjected to the sociocultural positions offered by those texts, but I'm attempting to resist these positions through my own analysis. And in the interview situations, the informants have been engaged in presenting themselves credibly to the researcher (me), who, in turn, has an agenda which is to produce a valid piece of academic research (Finlay, 2002b:534).

Reflexivity acknowledges these complex and potentially conflicting dynamics and can manifest itself as the researcher's explicit awareness of these points. Macmillan (1995), for

example, addresses issues such as those I have outlined above, by constructing a voice for her research participants. The creation of a fictional dialogue or alternative voices can, of course, be irritating (see Pinch & Pinch, 1988:191). However, by presenting such a contrast in style and structure from conventional academic writing, the creation of an awareness is more easily achieved. Another way to produce a similar effect is to include separate sections within the text or thesis (see Wynne, 1988), although the challenge of avoiding self-indulgence and a weakening of one's own academic argument remains (see Macmillan, 1996:16).

My solution for foregrounding the relationship between myself, the analyst and my research is to include sections on the way in which readers (of which I am one) are positioned by the magazine texts and to draw attention to my own role in the interview process. I have done the latter in Chapter 3 where I considered my research methodology and I shall return to it again in Chapter 8 where I analyse some extracts from my interview data. Within Chapters 5, 6 and 7, where I conduct the textual analysis, I have also discussed how readers (and this includes myself) are positioned by the texts that they are reading. So I am interpreting the texts in two ways: from my position as analyst and researcher and also from my position as a magazine reader. In this way, I demonstrate my awareness of the role I've played in shaping this project through my interest. It also highlights the point that another researcher may have done things in a different way, coming to perhaps different interpretations and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Redefining cultural roles in older age: grand-parenting as an extension of parenthood

Redefining what it means to be an older person in Western societies involves a consideration of the cultural roles we adopt at any given stage of our lives. As Hareven (1995:123) and others have detailed, chronological life stages became increasingly distinct during the last century. Before then, there had been no clear divide between different stages of adulthood until it became necessary to differentiate between them because of various institutional factors. However, in postmodern societies there has been a reversal of this trend with less importance linked to the roles that are associated with any given (chronological) age stage (see Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991:372). The blurring of previous distinctions allows for a transitional status and a less fixed set of characteristics than was previously the case to be attached to particular cultural roles. In this chapter I use the theme of becoming a grandparent, and more specifically, of becoming a grandmother in the 21st century in order to examine whether there are changes occurring in the meanings and behaviours associated with older people at the current time.

The traditional role of grandparent sits uneasily with the idea of a 'uni-age behavioural style' which Meyrowitz (1985:249) refers to. This describes the merging of experiences, lifestyles, behaviour and dress across the generations in recent decades. The triggers which account for these trends are that children have an increased access to information sources detailing adult life such as television and other media. In addition, older adults can look forward to an increased life expectancy and quality of life, even into the later years. Moreover, an increased emphasis on a consumer, youth oriented culture foregrounds certain attributes such as attractiveness and a youthful appearance as vital, particularly for women, to an extent

where older women are judged more negatively than men of the same age (see Sontag, 1978). Harsh societal judgement may go some way towards explaining why old age and becoming older is perceived as distasteful and why its physical manifestations should be avoided. But it is only the visible signs of ageing that can be avoided, because biologically it is impossible to avoid ageing. From her work on the proliferation of skincare advertisements in women's magazines, Coupland (2003, 2006) reminds us that, in purchasing anti-ageing skincreams, it is not ageing that women are seeking to avoid, it is the *appearance* of ageing.

Drawing on Woodward (1991), Coupland (2003:133) finds evidence in the advertisements and texts she analyses to support the idea of 'unwatchability' of age: a woman cannot watch her own ageing body, in particular her face, so she finds ways to mask what is happening. One could, alternatively, interpret a woman's potential distaste at her own, ageing reflection in another way. Old age is in fact very 'watchable'; we watch it all the time and progress is measured against what is seen. But it is measured against what is happening on the outside, to those other than ourselves. In this way we define ourselves as having either been successful or unsuccessful in avoiding the visual manifestations (such as wrinkles). A person can say: 'I don't look old, I don't look like x, I have avoided this fate', or: 'I look old, I look like y, I must rectify the problem'. We have to be able to watch old age and do so constantly, although we may not like what we see. We may not like what we see because of the universal foregrounding of traits such as youthfulness which is equated with attractiveness (particularly sexual) in media publications, like magazines or advertisements, on TV and in films. But we have to be able to see ageing's visible signs or we do not know what we are fighting against. And it is not only appearance we are watching: there are behavioural characteristics and lifestyle activities which may earn us the label of someone who is old or someone who is young.

In order to determine how successful someone has been in avoiding being labelled as 'old', it is necessary to make a comparison or measurement. This is a common strategy that is employed in women's magazine texts: a comparison or allusion to someone or something else is often made. The comparison may be explicit, as in the case of the text which will be discussed here; it may also be implicit: the reader is encouraged to compare him or herself against the examples given.

In the particular article analysed in this chapter, a comparison between successful and less successful ageing is illustrated. The article *The rise of the yummy granny*, appeared in the April 2006 issue of *Good Housekeeping* (see Appendix T1). The article appears within a genre termed *Real Lives*, a genre which suggests it portrays lifestyle issues applicable to 'real' people, who may be similar in some respects to the magazine's readers. I am not sure, however, who is excluded by this category, whose lives, also discussed within the pages of women's magazines, are judged to be not 'real': possibly celebrities, or fictional characters; perhaps anyone other than the magazine's readers. On the other hand, this article is also about women in the 'public eye', so perhaps 'real' refers to parts of life that can concern us all, such as being a grandparent, the topic of this article.

Textual analysis: The rise of the yummy granny

The article that has been selected for analysis promotes the idea that becoming a mother or father's mother (that is, becoming a grandmother) does not have to be linked to dependency and decay. On the contrary, it can symbolise a continuation of active adulthood, not only in

relation to one's grandchildren but also in connection with one's status in the world at large. The aim of the article is to demonstrate that an older person's lifestyle and interests can be very similar, if not identical, to those of younger adults, and providing they abide by certain rules in relation to their roles, they can enjoy an active, productive life. It becomes evident that what appears to be the denotational or literal meaning of the words, phrases and images (the signs) that make up this article, relies on connotations in that it draws on the reader's socio-cultural knowledge of the associations particular words, phrases and images carry in UK society at this particular moment. Moreover, the reader's socio-cultural knowledge is dependent on the myths on which the article draws. This knowledge is assumed (by text producers) to consist of a current, common body of ideas concerning (in this case) the behaviour and status of a particular age group in a given society and that various roles that age group currently fulfils. By using the term 'currently', I draw attention to the idea of flux or transition which is alluded to in the article when depicting modern grandmother identities. Recall particularly Thwaites et al's (2002:69) point that myth is a place where struggles for meaning occur. This point is highly relevant when considering the idea that there is shift in the meanings of what it is to be older, and the roles that we assume when we are older, which is a specific theme of this article.

The photograph and title

The photograph which introduces the article consists of a smiling woman wearing make-up, cuddling a small child, with a caption, the first sentence of which is: *The stereotype persists, but when did you last see a sweet old lady knitting in a rocking chair?* In the caption, then, there is the presupposition that there has been a stereotype and that there continues to be one. Recall Allport's (1979:191) observation that a stereotype is not necessarily a negative

evaluation, but is ‘an exaggerated belief associated with a category’, which enables us to justify our behaviour towards the group or category that is being defined.

In the sentence in question, the attributes of the ‘stereotypical’ granny have been exaggerated, by picking out certain defining characteristics. Her nature is *sweet*. This is an interesting example of the parallels between the ways older adults and small children are described (Peccei, 2004), as it is not unusual to refer to a small child as ‘sweet’. *Knitting* is an activity which does not involve much physical effort, one which is less common than it used to be due to more up-to-date procedures in the manufacture of woollen garments. Thus, it functions as a metonym for old-fashion-ness. The *rocking chair* is symbolic of limited physical capabilities. It draws attention to the sedentary, less active nature that can be associated with old age. Again, one can make parallels with equipment associated with small children: they are rocked or comforted in cradles; older adults have rocking chairs. It is the connotations or associations these activities, qualities and items carry with them that are important, and these associations come from certain ‘truths’, for example one that links older age with dependence, inactivity and passiveness. It is a very traditional image which is being brought to mind, in Western cultures at least, by drawing on the reader’s sociocultural knowledge of what can happen when one is older.

The adversative conjunction *but* links the two clauses together, and indicates that the *sweet old lady knitting in a rocking chair* is the stereotype that is being referred to. Thus, the caption appears to challenge the validity of the stereotype’s continued existence, making use of the image it invokes in order to create meaning for the reader. By contrast, the smiling woman in the photograph is not *old, knitting* or in a *rocking chair*. She is clearly not ‘old’ in

the same sense invoked by the stereotype. To know that she is not old, the reader has to have the knowledge of what is commonly coded in the word 'old', that it is a negative evaluation used to describe someone and one which relies for its understanding on its opposition to terms such as 'young' or 'modern' and what is coded within those words. The negative associations of the term 'old' when used to refer to people are evident to the readers of these magazine titles because the term is avoided (or not given) in reference to its readership. Terms which are arguably more euphemistic such as 'mature women' or 'grown up women' are often found instead.

To return to the sentence under analysis, the questioning structure: *when did you last see…?* challenges the reader directly to consider its proposition: that the *sweet old lady* is a rarity which might not have been seen for some time because society has changed and this now represents an old-fashioned image which is no longer valid. The questioning structure, together with the use of *you* hails the reader directly (Althusser, 1971). Questions form the first pair part of an adjacency pair structure (Sacks et al, 1974:716) and therefore *you* need to respond (the second pair part), even if it is only to think about the last time *you* came across what is being described. The questioning structure is a device to 'hook' the reader into the article. It is because certain images continue to be invoked by these words, the possibility is raised that we are living in a time of transition, and although *you* might have trouble recalling when you last encountered the stereotype, she has not vanished completely. However, the new model of grandparenthood has not been completely naturalised, hence it needs to be described and it is this that makes the article noteworthy. The Myth of Ageing as a decline scenario is being drawn upon to structure the representation of the *sweet old lady* but the myth is being questioned as well. Recall that myth is a place where meaning can be

challenged and myths are the way in which texts structure their representations (Thwaites et al, 2002:69), and this point is being exemplified here.

The caption continues: *Feisty Noughties grandmothers look great and often have flourishing careers.* This instructs the reader to read the image in a particular way; it provides, in Barthes' (1977:40) terms, anchorage for the photograph, it directs the reader in which way, out of all the possible alternatives there are, to read the photograph. It pins down the connotations of the image onto the myths upon which it relies (Thwaites, et al, 2002:92). For example, we know that the smiling woman is not the child's mother, not because Edina looks too 'old' to be a mother, but because of the text placed in juxtaposition with the photograph: Edina, the smiling woman, then, is a grandmother, who looks *great*, probably with a successful career (also signalled by text, further down in a purple box to the left of the article: *Fashion designer, Edina Ronay, 62…*). Barthes's related concept of relay (1977:41) is also important, because we can see how both text and image reinforce one another, repressing any other possible readings (Barthes, 1977:40), thus confining text and image to the myths upon which the article, that is to follow, will draw. The caption goes on: *But one thing is guaranteed to make them weak at the knees – their beloved grandchildren.* Additional information is thus provided about today's grannies: they retain a mothering instinct, whatever else is different about them from the *sweet old lady*. In fact, the relationship is likened to a love affair. A smaller caption at the bottom right corner of the photograph reads: *Edina: 'When I go to pick up Tabitha, I feel terribly excited – there's nothing quite like it'.*

Each piece of information we are given enables us to 'read' further into the photograph and make sense of it: that Edina is a feisty, noughties grandmother, she has a successful career,

but she is also someone who is consumed, perhaps overwhelmingly so, by love for her grandchild. In fact, she is a grandmother who also retains characteristics often associated with motherhood. Here, I draw on Marshall (1991) who identifies distinct discourses associated with motherhood in her analysis of the social construction of motherhood in childcare manuals. One of her identified discourses was 'motherhood as ultimate fulfilment' (ibid: 68) where motherhood is constructed as satisfying and important, a discourse which is intertextually alluded to, both in the captions that accompany the photograph of Edina and in the article itself, as will become evident. It is important to note, however, that Edina is not only like a mother, she is like a 'yummy mummy' and therefore also retains the qualities and attributes (most notably attractiveness) associated with that ideal.

The photograph itself provides important information, allowing the reader access to an image of a *yummy granny*. According to Hodge & Kress (1988:128), visual cues such as this one allow readers to make judgements about modality or the status and reliability of a particular portrayal or message. Generally, photographs have higher modality, that is they are perceived to be a more truthful representation than, say, a cartoon or verbal text. This is important, particularly given the genre of this article (*Real Lives*). Conversely, there is no visual image to correspond with the *stereotype*, the *sweet old lady*. Perhaps, therefore, the *sweet old lady* is less real, at least in the 21st century, than the woman in the photograph, because she is not present visually; by contrast, the woman in the photograph, the 'yummy granny', is.

The main title of the article is: *Pilates, parties and face peels…The rise of the yummy granny.* The title has been divided into two parts, connected by 3 dots which appears to function (in

this case) as a type of connective or link between the two parts. There is no explicit linking between the two parts, but because they are juxtaposed (separated only by the three dots), this signals that they are connected and indeed that they mean the same, as will become apparent as we work through the article.

The three part list *Pilates, parties and face peels* describes activities, metonymically, which are associated with, or are part of, the yummy grannies. The important aspect of each of these activities is contained in the connotations or associations embedded in each of them. For example, *Pilates,* a particular form of exercise, is indicative of keeping fit and responsibly taking care of oneself, which is promoted almost universally in Western societies as vital for any age, but particularly so for the woman who is aware that she is growing older (see, for example, Blaikie, 1999; Gott 2005). *Parties* symbolise youth; they are often presented as a preserve of the young. They are activities which involve going out, meeting people, perhaps dancing and drinking alcohol, contrasting quite dramatically with the original stereotype of sitting in a rocking chair. Finally, *face peels* represent another strategy of age resistance, not as dramatic or as controversial as cosmetic surgery, but nevertheless, a strategy which is more invasive than anti-ageing skin creams or make-up. The three part list and what each of the activities in the list represents (the sum and its parts) is linked to and describe characteristics associated with the yummy granny and her ascension: *…The rise of the yummy granny.*

To interpret the title further requires knowledge of the noun phrase 'yummy mummy' which has come into existence in the last few years. 'Yummy mummy' describes a sexually attractive mother. A mother must be marked as 'yummy' because there is an assumption that

motherhood traditionally marks the end of being sexually attractive. As Sunderland (2000:267) points out, motherhood and sexuality are often presented as if in binary opposition to one another, in other words, that one state precludes the other.

The meaning of the word *yummy* (delicious; OED, 1989) takes on a second-order or connotational meaning of sexual attractiveness, and when placed in juxtaposition with the word 'mummy' (the name a young child might call its mother) describes a woman still considered to be eligible for a man's sexual attention. Thus, when *yummy* premodifies *granny* (the name a young child might use to refer to its grandmother), the possibility is presented that an older woman, might be considered, in Gott's (2005:23) terms, to be a 'sexy oldie'. Gott (ibid) observes that there has been an effort in recent times to sexualize later life. This has come about from an increased emphasis on a consumer culture, as well as the influence of pharmaceutical companies and social organisations, in combination with (Gott believes) a more positive ageing movement within Western societies generally. What seems apparent, however, is that 'positive ageing' is labelled as positive because it is associated with youthful qualities or attributes, particularly sexual attractiveness, and consumption.

Understanding the title therefore relies on the reader's cultural knowledge and their current knowledge and awareness of relatively new idiomatic phrases. Using that knowledge, the reader is able to recognise, intertextually, what the title means. Taken together, the photograph, the image invoked by the stereotype, and the noun phrase *yummy granny* together give an indication that the article will be challenging traditional stereotypes of later life.

Thus in *The rise of the yummy granny* we are watching a very watchable old age. The text is modelling a way of remaining 'young' while growing old, even after having experienced a rite of passage (having grandchildren) which, on the one hand, might tip us beyond responsible adulthood (recall *the sweet old lady*), but most certainly puts us into another age category, another generation: that of a mother's mother. We only know, however, that the older women who are subjects of this article are positively watchable because they are compared with someone who is not, a metonym that stands for a version of age that is not the direct subject of this article: *the sweet old lady*. *The sweet old lady* nevertheless contributes heavily to an understanding of the article by providing a measure against which to judge not only the three women of this article, but also oneself, if not now, then sometime in the future (recall Perkins, 1996:22 point that we compare ourselves against those stereotypes that we encounter). In the various ways I have described then, the article appeals to a wide age range among the readership. By setting out a new version of grand-parenting, it may work to alleviate anxiety about what is to come for those who are not yet grandparents. In addition, it may demonstrate cultural behaviour for those who are already grandparents, perhaps not entirely comfortable in that role.

In order to be a *yummy granny*, however, a grandchild is required:

'I rather like the idea of going out with my granddaughter and looking glamorous'.

This is the last part of the introductory title to the article, re-emphasising the importance of what one looks like, if one is to be perceived as *yummy*. These are Edina's words, and they are given in quotation marks: this is something she has actually said to the interviewer (or, at

least, it is represented this way) and it summarises her attitude, one which indicates that she is happy to be a grandmother publicly, but that to her, appearance is an important aspect of this activity. The fact that these two ideas (*going out with my granddaughter/looking glamorous*) are presented together further suggests that what is being invoked is still somewhat unconventional, and may, hitherto, not have been considered as "normal". Moreover, it also draws on our cultural knowledge of what a 'yummy mummy' is: a glamorous, sexually attractive mother. Certain activities are also presupposed in Edina's utterance: that the granny is partially responsible for and takes care of her grandchild, indeed she takes over the mothering role sometimes, a fact which is signposted in *going out with my granddaughter* and elaborated upon in the text of the article as will become apparent.

The main body of the article consists of 'interviews' with three grandmothers, Edina Ronay, Eve Pollard and Joan Bakewell; the first is a high profile fashion designer and the latter two are well-known in the world of broadcasting. I draw attention to the term 'interview' because although each section of the article has been presented as if it were the interviewee's own words, it is worth noting, as Talbot (1998:181) has done, the probability that other texts (for example, the original spoken interview, the interview notes and recording) come before what is finally printed. These may involve discussions, editing and revision by magazine staff, and it is impossible to say who or what has been involved in the final version. Thus, although it is written at the end of the article, at a 90 degree angle to the rest of the text: *As told to Jo Adnitt; Ellie O'Mahoney…,*one must acknowledge the part of others in the representations that appear. These points are important because they can assist in an understanding of how media representations are manufactured.

Edina Ronay

The article starts with Edina's interview and the opening line is as follows:

To me, the image of grandmothers being stuffy and frumpy is really dated. That went out with the previous generation of women.

This presupposes that a particular (somewhat negative) image of a grandmother still exists, although its continued relevance is questioned. The persisting *stereotype* as defined in the beginning of the article is being referred to here by Edina and she is encouraging readers to consider the stereotype as a thing of the past by drawing on problematic and selective descriptions (*stuffy and frumpy*) about that stereotype (Perkins, 1996:23), which allow the reader to distance themselves from the *dated* image, by measuring themselves against it.

The image, according to Edina, needs updating, and her generation is the first of the new models. This is because she and others of her age have recognised this and, crucially, they are doing the updating, exemplifying it by their lifestyle and activities as described this article and hence in 'real life'. However, some aspects of grandparenthood remain the same, particularly the adoration and exaltation of children: *Before she [Tabitha] was born, I couldn't wait to become a granny.* This draws on the taken for granted assumption that the arrival of children is special and fulfilling, and can be linked once more to motherhood specifically (recall Marshall's (1991) identified discourses) and thus can be intertextually drawn upon by the reader in relation to becoming a grandparent. The reader can draw upon her own experiences of when she herself became a mother and extend the feelings and thoughts in relation to that experience onto the role of being a grandmother. I suggest, therefore, that the implied reader of this article is a mother, but not necessarily already a grandmother. Moreover, it is less likely that a woman without children (a real reader) would be drawn to such an article. In addition, we can once again draw upon Perkins (1996:23) and

the idea that stereotypical characteristics are presented as 'natural' and thus stereotyping is ideological. That is because what is being drawn upon here is the taken for granted and commonsense notion that women have a special and primary role in relation to children. In fact, this is foregrounded throughout this entire article as I will show.

I wasn't remotely worried about how people would perceive me once I was a grandmother.

Again, there is a presupposition that one might be negatively evaluated on becoming a grandparent (or at the very least that a revaluation might take place), perhaps because this has to date signalled membership of an older, less valued generation. Thus, Edina's words allude to and draw upon the Myths of Ageing as decline and as symbolising a loss of power. However, the new model of being a grandparent, outlined in this article, indicates this does not have to be the case. Edina demonstrates she has the confidence to believe that she has value despite having become a grandparent. This may be partially linked to her occupation, a *fashion designer*. Thus, at 62, she is still part of the workforce. Furthermore, in drawing on the word 'fashion' in particular, the nature of her occupation associates her with youth, appearance, looking good and keeping up-to-date. Edina continues:

I think it's a natural progression for a woman to grow up and want to have children and, in the same way, it's natural for any mother to get older and want to have grandchildren

Here, motherhood is presented as a normal and natural activity, reproduced across the generations, reinforcing women as primary childcarers: males, for example, fathers or grandfathers, are backgrounded, without image or voice. Moreover, it is presented that not only is it 'normal' and 'natural' for a woman to want to have children, but also that it is 'normal' and 'natural' to want to have grandchildren. Drawing on Barthes (1972), Johnston & Swanson (2003a:22) describe the first as a motherhood myth, one that describes

motherhood as 'natural and instinctive', rather than 'cultural and economic', so one can suggest that the 'naturalness' of wanting grandchildren has mythic qualities as well. This allows that 'naturalness' to become part of the new stereotype of a grandmother that this article is attempting to define, reiterating the ideological aspect to the concept of stereotypes (Perkins, 1996:23).

Evidence of a woman's responsibility for her children which is reproduced across the generations, passed on from mother to daughter, is provided by Edina:

Even before the birth, I suggested to my daughter Shebah that I take Tabitha for 24 hours at least once a week…My own mother did it for me…

And she goes on to describe her typical grandparenting activities:

My husband and I take her swimming or to the park. Recapturing all the experiences you once shared with your own children is such fun, and you're much less anxious than you used to be. Obviously you worry about their safety, but the nature of your relationship takes away that constant pressure you feel as a mother.

In the extract, *you* is used in a kind of generalised, universal sense, helping to present the information given as normal behaviour, applicable to everyone. Moreover, readers are positioned by the use of *you* as 'obviously' responsible, caring, fun loving and child centred, just as mothers are, or stereotypically portrayed as being. They are, in Althusser's terms, (1971) hailed, because it is very likely that readers will recognise themselves in the *you* that is being described here, particularly since the characteristics associated with *you* stereotypically apply to 'good' female child carers, whether mothers or grandmothers. Recall Allport's (1979:191) point that a stereotype may be favourable as well as unfavourable. The crucial aspect is that a stereotype's characteristics are exaggerated (Allport, ibid) and Edina's

portrayal of the idealistic nature of being a grandmother show this, because she is describing all the positive aspects, rather than including some less positive ones, such as the fact that small children are both trying and demanding at times, which cannot be described as *fun*.

In addition, there is the presupposition that looking after children is an anxiety-provoking role, but one in which the pressure is less as one gets older and becomes more experienced. Thus, the grandparenting role is presented as similar to, yet more fun and carefree than that of a mother's role. Demonstrating that one is much less anxious than one used to be has to be countered, however, by an assertion that safety of small children remains a concern. UK society generally is preoccupied with the safety and care of minors. Evidence for this lies in the many societal institutions (e.g. child protection agencies) devoted to providing parameters and standards for their care. It is important, therefore, that Edina presents herself as responsible and competent as these are attributes often perceived as lacking in older adults, which causes them sometimes to be treated as if they are children themselves (see Peccei, 2004). Next, Edina discusses her age explicitly:

I was 60 when Tabitha was born, so I was quite young, really. Age isn't important to me, probably because I'm not aware of it. I'm so busy, I don't think I behave like a 62 year old, however that may be

In this extract, Edina considers herself to be *quite young. really*, although the addition of *quite* and *really* suggests that she acknowledges that this is a relative judgement, relating to herself as a grandmother specifically, rather than as a woman generally. Furthermore, she wants to emphasise the irrelevancy of chronological age by pointing out she does not even think about it, except when she is asked directly, as she may have been, for the purposes of this article. This is because she is leads an active life, in contrast to how a 62 year old might be expected to behave. The addition of *however that may be* refers the reader back to the

original ‘stereotypical’ mental image of the *sweet old lady knitting in a rocking chair* and the exaggerated characteristics used to define her. Furthermore, by using herself as an example, Edina is able to convey that what it is to be 62 is no longer quite as fixed (if ever it was) and that different versions of ageing are now possible. In these three sentences then, Edina is distancing herself from her chronological age; by saying age doesn’t matter, she is also distancing herself from the *stuffy and frumpy* grandmother referred to in the first sentence of the article. Moreover, she echoes a common theme of monthly magazine titles in general, that women, including older women, lead busy, active and productive lives. Note, however, the contradictory element which operates: Edina first classifies herself as relatively young when she became a grandmother. At the same time, however, she is acknowledging that there is a type of ‘old’ behaviour associated with being sixty two, which does not include being *busy* but somewhat passive and sedentary, like the *sweet old lady*. Next, Edina expresses another common theme of older women and their portrayal in magazines:

I’ve never worried about my appearance, and becoming a grandmother hasn’t changed that because I’ve always thought I look good for my age…One of the most important things to do when you’re a grandma is stay fit. I practise Pilates twice a week…

Edina would like to emphasise that she remains confident about her appearance, a fact which has not altered because she has become a grandmother. She considers that she looks *good for her age* and will be evaluated as such by others. This is a key phrase, which occurs frequently, twice in this article but many times in the magazines I have studied. Its meaning is slightly different to that of looking younger than one’s age, which is often evaluated negatively as ‘trying too hard’. Looking good for one’s age involves actively engaging in a healthy lifestyle (note: Edina stresses the importance of keeping fit, and *Pilates*, the example of the subtitle, is mentioned). What is embedded in the phrase ‘looking good for one’s age’ or versions of it, are positive associations or connotations derived from the efforts of

celebrities (such as Madonna, Sharon Stone, Twiggy, Jane Fonda) no longer considered as 'young', who work hard to look good. We know this because of the advertising campaigns for skincare products, or the other activities with which these celebrities are frequently associated in countless media publications. They are considered to be attractive even though they are older and are thus able to command lucrative work based on their appearance as well as their skills. They can also act as role models for 'real' people, by modelling desirable behaviour (looking after oneself, using expensive face creams and so on). Celebrities are specifically dealt with in the next chapter of this thesis.

Eve Pollard

Many similar themes are reiterated and discussed in the second interview with Eve Pollard. For example, there is evidence to suggest that maternal knowledge and practice is 'handed down' from female to female:

I enjoyed the fact that I could pass on my experiences as a mother to Claudia. We talked a lot and discussed any worries she had.

Here, the idea of a mother teaching and reassuring her child is expressed. Note that, as in the case of the previous interview, and as Marshall (1991:70) found in her analysis of childcare manuals, a good relationship between mother and daughter is presupposed and therefore implied to be normal and natural. Similarities between having grandchildren and having a love affair are also made explicit by Eve:

When Jake was born, I fell instantly in love with him. I can only describe the relationship between grandmother and grandchild as a love affair.

To a certain extent, another of Marshall's (1991:69) identified discourses of motherhood ('mother love as natural') is drawn upon in order to demonstrate that love for a child is also reproduced across the generations. It is 'normal' and 'natural' to love children, whether as a mother or as a grandmother and the role that is being drawn out for these grandmothers, is that they perform a mothering function sometimes towards their grandchildren. Eve also invokes the old 'stereotype' as a comparison to show that things have changed and that she, too, is part of that change:

These days it's not just the old-fashioned image of a knitting grandma that has changed…One difficulty facing some grandmothers is that they aren't free to do a lot of childcare because they still have careers and busy social lives of their own.

The fact that Eve draws upon the 'old' stereotype of a grandmother and the exaggerated characteristics associated with that construct is important. This is because it reinforces the myth that getting older is associated with old fashion-ness and decline (in terms of slowing down) but at the same time, it allows her to foreground the possibility that an alternative can be achieved, which involves *careers and busy social lives.*

So, once more, a common theme in the life of the modern, older woman is foregrounded: independence, in the form of careers and social lives, which may impact on their ability to perform an active, grandparenting role. Crucially, older women are portrayed as continuing to contribute to society, rather than becoming reliant upon it. Gott (2005:9) points to the way in which old age is viewed as intertwined with dependency: one's status as an adult is called into question. Citing Bytheway (1995), she draws attention to the fact that paid employment

is a significant indicator of status and identity in Western society. Women who continue to work, such as those depicted here, can, therefore, continue to claim legitimate membership to a largely unmarked adult category. This, however, presents grandmothers with some difficulties: combining their own interests with responsibilities towards their extended families. The overall effect is to present being a grandmother as involving a number of choices, rather than being associated with a limited, narrow, dependent social world (recall, again, the *stereotype* drawn out at the beginning of this article, someone without image or voice, in sharp contrast to the version of grandmotherhood being demonstrated here). Next, issues connected to appearance are explicitly expressed by Eve:

When you find out you're going to be a grandmother, it does make you think about looking older, and sometimes I do consider having some cosmetic surgery…Perhaps I'll have… a chemical peel…I just want to look good for my age.

On the one hand, there is Edina, who asserts that she is not aware of her age, but for Eve it has become a concern. Indeed, the very idea of becoming a grandmother is associated in her mind as connected to looking older. Like Edina, Eve has also presented issues connected to becoming a grandmother by using *you* in a generalised sense as if it is applicable universally to all women. The reader is 'hailed' directly (Althusser, 1971), in the sense that it is taken for granted that *you* will become a grandmother and that will increase your concerns about looking older.

Moreover, Eve mentions a form of cosmetic surgery, specifically *face peels* (foregrounded in the title of the article). The Myth that Ageing must be resisted is being drawn upon directly

here. The fact that Eve's thought process needs no explanation for the reader demonstrates how normal this thought process is constructed to be: becoming a grandmother leads on to thinking about becoming and looking older which leads on to a consideration of strategies for age resistance and what form that could take (in this case, cosmetic surgery). Pronoun use (*you*) has the effect of positioning the reader as someone who will 'obviously' be concerned with their looks in relation to getting older, and once again, it is assumed that the reader will be able to recognise herself (Althusser, 1971) in what is being described. Note, however, that pronoun use shifts back to 'I' in Eve's description of her thoughts on cosmetic procedures. This is because not all readers can be positioned as feeling positive about such procedures, as there are conflicting discourses circulating within society currently as to their acceptability. This becomes apparent again in the next chapter, where I consider Celebrities, in the words of Andie MacDowell and Jane Fonda. *Good for my age* is, however, once again expressed as an important goal and keeping fit is part of that. As Eve puts it:

But health is also vital when you're a grandparent. Children move so fast that you have to be able to keep up with them.

This is a message to the reader, whether already grandparent or not: to avoid becoming the 'stereotype' of *the sweet old lady, knitting in a rocking chair*, one must remain fit enough to be useful. Adding to Gott's (2005:9) observations about the idea of dependency being intertwined with old age and by drawing on Barthes (1972), we can suggest that the visible signs of ageing signify more than their denotational or referential meaning (that one is growing older). They bring with them connotations or associations of failure: failure to continue to engage in mainstream activities; failure to do the necessary body work required to maintain a youthful appearance; or failure in being able to maintain a physical body so

one can continue to be useful to younger age groups (for example, by looking after their children).

As a modern grandmother, there are, however, *rules* to be observed. This becomes apparent when Eve expresses a concern for abiding by parental wishes concerning bringing up their children:

I think I'm a very well-behaved grandmother – I always abide by Claudia's rules about Jake. I don't give him chocolates or sweets.…I feel strongly that she must raise him the way she and her husband want to, and I should fit in with it.

Here, Eve is modelling modern grandparenting behaviour. It is appropriate and desirable to pass on knowledge and experience and to offer to help, but it is not the task of grandparents to impose their parenting rules on their children. In UK society, then, it is not necessarily the case that the older generation knows best. Modern methods are superseded by newer versions and it is the task of the grandparent to respect this, rather than the task of the new parent to believe that their own parents know best. In other words, grandparents should respect their children's wishes rather than the other way around. For instance, in keeping with contemporary discourses of healthy eating/healthy living, Eve points out (but does not have to elaborate on) the fact that she does not offer sweets or chocolate to her grandson. This is a modern way of life, associated with Jake's parent's generation, rather than with Eve's.

That Eve regards herself as *well-behaved* suggests there may be some grandmothers who behave 'badly' by attempting to force their children to accept certain (now old-fashioned) child-rearing practices. *Well-behaved* also carries with it notions of adult judgements on childhood behaviour, suggesting that a grandmother should be aware of her place in a

hierarchical familial and societal structure. She still does not have the same prestige and status as younger adults, despite her more active, participatory role, and, interestingly, despite her relatively high public status compared to her daughter.

Joan Bakewell

The new grandparenting behaviour is reiterated in Joan Bakewell's interview. She comments:

I'm very careful not to push my idea of parenting on to my children, although sometimes it's hard not to. When my daughter told me that her son had had problems sleeping and she'd let him sleep with her and her husband for the night, I found myself saying, "I never did that." My daughter just gave me a look, put up her hand and said, "Mum, that was then and this is now." I'm happy to give my opinion when I'm asked, though.

This both suggests and reinforces Eve's earlier points that help and advice should be available if required, but it is not the prerogative of the grandparent to provide what is not asked for. Indeed, one must accept that practices in relation to child rearing have changed but that crucially, the grandmother must know her place, rather than challenging current behaviour. The past is over; the present as mapped out by the younger generation has validity. It is also about acceptance of one's own position as an older person and the shift that has occurred. Whereas a grandmother would have had a greater hierarchical status over her daughter at one time (at the time she was exclusively the mother), now the position has changed, especially in relation to her grandchildren. The grandmother has responsibilities towards both child and grandchild, but does not have the same status and power she may have once had. I would argue that both Eve and Joan's behaviour, and the way it is presented (Eve describes herself as *well-behaved*; Joan does not *push my idea of parenting on to my children*) reinforces the Myth that ageing involves a loss of power: the tables have turned because the younger generation can define acceptable behaviour. Ideal parenting behaviour is, however, outlined by Joan:

I've taken them to the theatre and to all the museums in London and constantly strive to teach them things – I see it as my duty.

Thus it is outlined, in the words of those who are successful grandparents, such as these three women, that there are obligations to fulfil as part of that role. And the possibility that a grandmother might go beyond her *duty* to an extent that is not required, is reinforced in:

I do have to be careful not to overdo it, though, because when I go overboard, they start saying, "Grandma, do we really need to know this?"

Once again, the prerogative of younger generations to define acceptable behaviour is stressed, removing some level of power and authority from the older adult who is expected to know their place and to be reminded of it if it is forgotten. It is about behaving in an appropriate way fitting to the role and of being available, when needed for those younger. It is an extension of the motherhood role but with less status and right; more obligation and duty. Older women do not have as much power as younger mothers, although they are being encouraged to perform many similar functions.

Unlike the two preceding interviews, in Joan Bakewell's interview there is no explicit reference to her own appearance and no evidence to suggest why this might be the case. It may be that either she and/or the interviewer do not consider this to be relevant to the issues under discussion. Perhaps this is because Joan Bakewell is 72, some 10 years older than the other interviewees. On the other hand, it may be that no special import is attached to such an omission, although it is noticeable (in the context of this analysis) that such a discussion has been referred to explicitly in the other two interviews. Moreover, the photograph that accompanies this part of the article depicts Joan in the centre, surrounded by her

grandchildren and other family members. The caption is: *Joan (centre): 'The more grandchildren I have, the more love there is to give'*. The caption ensures we read the photograph in a particular way: that Joan Bakewell, a successful broadcaster, has a lot of love and energy for her grandchildren. But there is no reference to what she looks like: the caption emphasises only her familial status. Recall the photograph of Edina Ronay at the beginning of this article and various captions which accompanied it. She was clearly a *feisty noughties grandmother who looked great*, and indeed she described herself as *looking glamorous*. In common with the interviews with Edina and Eve, however, there are numerous references in Joan's interview to a busy, full life, where the importance of work is emphasised:

When my first grandchild Thomas was born, I was 58 and still jetting all over the world for work.

The constancy suggested by 'still' indicates that *jetting all over the world for work* might not be considered a normal activity at this time of life, or in the context of becoming a grandmother. Again, we are referred back to the *stereotype* of the knitting granny in rocking chair at the beginning of this article. Like the other women in this article, Joan's lifestyle provides a complete contrast to the previous image. It is almost an opposition, black and white, all or nothing. While the stereotype is an exaggeration with which to compare these three women with, they, on the other hand, are also exaggerations but they are framed as positive exaggerations (recall Allport's (1979:191) observation that a stereotype is an exaggerated belief, but that it may be favourable as well as unfavourable). These women are idealisations, because it is likely that most women readers will have lives that are not quite as 'successful' in terms of status, but will nevertheless probably be as busy as these women are represented to be. This point (that their lives are full and busy), especially, will allow readers

to measure themselves against the two stereotypical representations (old and new) that are being invoked, thus reinforcing both versions (Perkins, 1996:23).

Joan's societal status is also foregrounded in the following:

When they come to stay, I'm not a career woman, I'm just Grandma. I block out my diary and don't take on any work at all

This presupposes that Joan's principal role is that of a *career woman*, with a busy diary and offers of work, but that is only one of several roles; putting young children first is another. In a similar way to the interviews with Edina and Eve, what is being presented here is what Van Zoonen (1991:36-37) would refer to as a type of 'liberal media strategy'. This is the way in which dominant societal values of the 'naturalness' of motherhood are now combined with the stereotype of 'Superwoman' which describes someone who has status in both the public and private spheres. To a certain extent, the Myth that Ageing means a loss of (economic) power is being challenged by these three women because they are clearly successful in the public sphere despite being older. Moreover, the idea that the modern grandmother is productive, independent and valued, and that there may be many demands on her time is reinforced. This point is highlighted by drawing attention to Joan's *diary*, the instrument in which time is documented and accounted for. Moreover, this is evident in the final paragraph which functions as a type of summary of Joan's interview, reiterating many of the major points:

I've got a very full life of my own, which I think is important because children learn through their grandparents what it is to be an older person.

Here, the idea is presented that younger generations learn from those older what constitutes desirable behaviour in older adults and it is therefore important that those, such as Joan, model this appropriately and correctly. Having a very full life is highlighted as fundamental, and this emphasis, which is reiterated overwhelmingly in representations of modern day ageing seems to be key to success as an older person. This is outlined in Joan's summary of herself:

And in me they see someone who's out and about, eating in restaurants, going to parties and loving life – as well as being a very proud grandma.

Parties is one of the activities of the trio that formed part of the subtitle of the article, although Joan mentions others, which also involve socialisation and interaction (recall that *pilates* was mentioned in Edina's interview and *face peels* in Eve's). The final sentence of Joan's interview reminds the reader that it is possible to do all these things in addition to being a grandma, again emphasising the gulf that exists between the *stereotype* (who sits in a rocking chair, performing a solitary activity) and the newer versions of grandparenthood which have been described (or modelled) in the three interviews.

The shortie (text box)

To the left of the Joan Bakewell's interview there is a square box, in Johnston & Swanson's (2003b:248) terms, a 'shortie', that is a text unit which is less than a page. Its title (*8 great rules for yummy grannies*) and its content are written in an instructional mode, giving a series of imperative commands, typical of rules, which presuppose a knowledge and authority on the part of the writer greater and more proficient than that of the reader, for example, *Never say… Learn which is… Make sure…* and so on. Issues raised in the interviews are reiterated. For example, one is instructed:

Never say to your son or daughter, 'I had you out of nappies by the time you were 18 months old.' Even if it's true, he or she doesn't want to know

This 'rule' appears to concern the modern granny 'knowing their place' in the hierarchical structure of contemporary society. Using nappies as an example, the 'rule' also serves to highlight how parenting practices may have changed from one generation to the next. The example given relies on the reader's understanding and knowledge that due to modern, disposable nappies, it is not actually 'necessary' to dispense with them as early as it once was. Moreover, it also draws on discourses of child-led and child-centred practices which emphasise negotiation with children rather than force. The fact that the *parent doesn't want to know* further emphasises that one should not force one's ideas and old, out-dated practices upon someone else, while also reinforcing that it is the task of the granny not to call the younger mother's competence into question. Next the yummy granny is told to:

Learn which is which of Tinky-Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po. (And Thomas, Gordon, Henry and Percy.)

Curiously, there is no explanation given as to who exactly, these characters are. It is possible an assumption has been made that, in fact, everyone is familiar with these TV children's characters, or that it will be easy to find out. I suspect that the clue is the second reference to Thomas (the Tank Engine) as this is a much older childhood make believe character, and so by making reference to Thomas (who the granny is more likely to be familiar with), the granny will be alerted to, and able to make the connection as to the identity of the other characters. This reference to childhood TV characters is about keeping up to date with the programmes the grandchildren are assumed (by the text producers) to be likely to watch. Omitting who the characters are (the Teletubbies) is intentional because the message is

clearly that if you don't know who they are, you need to find out and that as an older person, you need to have an awareness of current trends.

There is also an assumption that grannies need to learn how to be 'modern'. For example, the prospective granny is told to:

Keep in touch If you're not going to see your grandchildren for a while, phone, email or text them.

And that:

Mastering the art of modern technology will help you keep up to date with all their news.

This presupposes, firstly, that the granny needs to be instructed to make contact, and the ways in which this can happen. It also presupposes that *modern technology* is something the older woman needs to master because she is not already competent, once again drawing on the existing stereotype of the *sweet old lady* removed from socialisation and interaction with others. What is crucial about this statement is the implication that older people (and particularly older women) are less competent than those who are younger. Moreover, it implies that devices such as mobile phones and computers are those that older women will regard as *modern,* that is, phenomena that are new for them and not something they are used to. The implication of incompetence continues in the next rule:

Practise folding and unfolding the buggy or pushchair. Then practise it again…and again, until you really do know how to do it.

Placing these two 'rules' next to one another reinforces the suggestion that older people (particularly women) will find it harder to be proficient in certain activities and equipment use, reinforcing the incompetence aspect which is often linked to older age groups. They will

need to allow for this and make a conscious effort to compensate for their inevitable shortcomings.

What has been embedded within the first 'rule' (*Never say to your son or daughter...*) is similarly reinforced in another 'rule' which demonstrates that grandparental behaviour should involve particular and prescribe help, but not unsolicited advice:

Don't give advice unless you're asked for it. Do you remember feeling resentful when your own mother or mother-in-law told you how to raise your children?

To minimise the possibility that the reader will question or reject the validity of the 'rule', she is asked to recall her own experience of motherhood, an experience which may have included negative feelings towards her own parents. The addition of *do you* before *remember* indicates it is not certain that the reader will have experienced these negative feelings, but nevertheless the possibility is raised that it is not uncommon to have such feelings, and that resentment in the younger person can occur if one does not take care to know one's place. Moreover, note that responsibility for childcare and advice-giving is presented as a female concern; no males are mentioned.

The 'rules' (later redefined as *tips*) come from a book on *modern grandparenting* by *Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall*. Describing the book's contents in these terms reinforces the theme of the article that the new version of grandparenting is recent, perhaps not yet universal, and needs to be defined. By calling it *The Good Granny Guide* the reader is alerted to the possibility that there could be a 'bad' way of performing the grandmother role. The most likely way of doing this seems to be by imposing one's own rules and practices upon the younger generations while not allowing and compensating for the inevitable shortcomings of

old age. I would argue that the *rules* and the way they are presented to the prospective Granny are structured by all of the Myths of Ageing. The instructional mode reiterates the loss of power, allowing others to address older people in this way. The rules particularly concerning nappies and passing on advice seem very clearly aimed at reiterating the loss of power to express one's own point of view. Ageing as decline is foregrounded, very obviously, in the rules concerning mastering IT skills and learning how to operate a buggy. These two points also highlight the necessity for resisting ageing or resisting the attributes that are assumed to be involved in growing older: an inability to understand and to stay abreast of 'modern' developments.

The function of the textbox and its contents is to support and reiterate the points which have been emphasised in the main article. Note that the reader is informed in the last paragraph that: *you can buy her* [Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall] *book...from the Good Housekeeping Bookshop*. This allows *Good Housekeeping* magazine to place its 'seal of approval' on the representations of grand-parenting in the article. Moreover, the reader is addressed directly by the use of *you*, constructed as someone who will need some guidance on how to be a *good granny* and, indeed, how to be *a yummy granny*, because by this point (the end of the article) one has become synonymous with the other.

Reading the article

The dominant reading position of this article is based on the assumption that becoming older involves both decline and loss it is taken for granted that readers will understand this and read this article with those 'truths' in mind. The implied reader is constructed as someone who, as a woman will feel hopeful about the 'new version' of grandparenthood that is being described as it seems to offer more possibilities for a positive (and useful) old age than the 'old

stereotype'. This is the position the real reader is being encouraged to take up. Next, as women, readers are being shown that an extension of motherhood is possible and they may fulfil a role which allows them to continue to be useful to men: recall Itzin's (1986) research which concluded that women became less useful once they had reached the mid-forties. Therefore, there is the assumption that motherhood is a crucial part of a woman's identity and thus women are being steered towards reading the text with that 'understanding' in place. Any 'loss' which occurs as a woman's own children grow up may be substituted by looking after her grandchildren. There is an overwhelming reliance on maternal myths, particularly the special and fulfilling role that children occupy in women's lives and these form a basis for the function of grandparenthood, based implicitly on the assumption that women will want to continue in a child caring role.

Moreover, because the text describes the granny as *yummy*, the implied reader is further constructed as someone who is likely to consider attractiveness to be an important part of being a woman. Women are being shown in this article that it is possible to remain attractive (with effort!) into the later years and what is implicit is that the real reader will find the message of continuing attractiveness a positive one, because it seems to counter the Myths of decline and loss in relation to ageing. What is questionable, however, is just how 'positive' this version of getting older really is, because its defining characteristic seems to be to learn a set of behaviours and practices which allows one to fulfil a useful role to others. Having said that, the emphasis remains firmly on a busy lifestyle with which the grandparenting role has to be fitted in. We can adapt and apply the 'Superwoman' construct to the older woman then too (see Van Zoonen, 1991:36-37): the granny is able to remain successful in both the public and private spheres well into the later years.

In summary

What can be concluded from an analysis of this article about the way older women and those that are grandmothers in particular are represented? On the one hand, we can suggest that this article is promoting a positive image of growing older, foregrounding the idea that a 'rite of passage' where one acquires the status of a parent's parent can also include continuing independence (recall the emphasis in all three interviews on a busy, productive working role). A concern for attractiveness and looking youthful is also highlighted explicitly in two of the interviews, together with an emphasis on remaining fit and mobile. Thus, it is emphasised that these feminine 'attributes' remain both feasible and desirable. Wanting to keep fit and mobile is presented not only as 'normal' and 'natural' behaviour, but also as a prerequisite in order to be able to fulfil one's new role. In order, however, to view becoming a grandmother positively, it is necessary to subscribe to attitudes, dress, appearance and behaviour commonly associated with younger age groups and to accept that these remain the yardstick by which one is judged.

A 'new' version of being a grandparent is, therefore, being drawn out and defined. The granny's activities and behaviour are outlined in relation to her children, her grandchildren, and her own life and lifestyle: a person who is active, independent, capable and attractive. Moreover, lurking in the background is what has been presented as a still existing stereotype, an image invoked for the reader to judge and compare as she reads through the article. The 'stereotype' is in many ways in opposition to the new version: someone who is relatively immobile, childlike by nature and engaged in out-dated, sedentary activities. The role of grandparent is thus presented as being in a state of transition between 'old stereotype' and 'new version', hence the need for this article to define the new and to model its skills and attributes.

The highly selective aspects of this article have been made apparent in this analysis. The two versions or ways of being a grandmother are being compared and contrasted and these two versions are stereotypes because they describe exaggerated qualities and behaviour. The old fashioned stereotype is very obvious: indeed it is labelled as such. It is selective in its description of a woman who has retired and is far removed from the 'action' of everyday life. She is a metonym, grounded in a dominant idea, and she represents a whole system or cultural way of being older (see Thwaites et al, 2002:67). The fact that this system, or way of being, is being challenged, or appears to be being challenged within this article, does not detract from the fact that one stereotype, or, at least, a very selective construction is being replaced by another, which subscribes to exactly the same values as the previous stereotype. The new stereotype, as exemplified by Edina, Eve and Joan, is still very firmly rooted in the three original Myths of Ageing. This is because although, superficially, it looks very much as if these three women are showing us that ageing is not a decline scenario, they are demonstrating that it can be IF one does not learn how to be a modern grandmother. All of these women have high status jobs, so on the one hand, they are showing us that ageing need not involve a loss of (economic) power and they are thus challenging the Myth to a certain extent. On the other hand, however, they reinforce the message that one's role is to be useful to others and, moreover, that one must subscribe to rules set by others. Thus, the Myth of Ageing as involving a loss of power is perpetuated in the 'new' version of being a grandparent albeit in a different way. And these three Yummy Grannies demonstrate that ageing must continue to be resisted. They refer to their appearance and lifestyles, all very firmly continuing to subscribe to values and ideas associated with younger age groups.

We can see that while the Myths of Ageing are being used to establish the representations in this article, they are being challenged at the same time. However, the positivity that can be extracted from the challenge to those Myths is undermined by the basis upon which the challenge is made, simply because the challenge is completely dependent on the qualities and attributes of youth, outlined above. Yes, older women can continue to be successful in both the public and the private sphere, and crucially, they can continue to be useful in both, but they must also subscribe to set of values and codes of behaviour determined by those younger. They must abide by *rules* such as those outlined in the 'shortie' which make them less powerful, as they are not their own rules. That ageing involves a loss of power is a myth very evident throughout this article, regardless of the fact that the article is trying to claim the opposite is true.

Nevertheless, the transitional status of growing older is very evident. We are being shown what is desirable and possible for an older person at the present time. By demonstrating and modelling 'successful' older age, by comparing it and contrasting it with the 'less successful', the reader is able to come to an interpretation of the opportunities that may be open to her, if she makes certain kinds of effort. For example, keeping fit, looking after oneself, continuing to work, and (crucially) helping to provide a parental role for the grandchildren can lead to a successful evaluation of the self by others and by society generally.

There is an emphasis in the last two interviews in particular on the idea that one must constrain one's behaviour, abiding and accepting the 'rules' and norms of younger generations in order to remain useful and valued to that generation. There is a reiteration of these points in the 'shortie' which implies that attractiveness is not solely connected to appearance but also to behaviour. In addition, although the three women who are interviewed

are clearly modern grandmothers, or 'yummy grannies', there is an assumption underlined in this article that being older for most women involves an extra, conscious effort if one is to remain 'yummy'. Extra effort is not only restricted to appearance, but is also highlighted in the necessity for 'learning' certain activities which may not be 'normal' or 'natural' for the older person (for example, computer literacy or using a piece of equipment). Thus, ageing must at all costs, be resisted. This is in sharp contrast to a major theme of all three interviews which is that women are often juggling successful (even high profile) careers at this time of life, a time which is often associated with a withdrawal from the workforce.

It is also worth taking account of the ways in which this article perpetuates the maternal myths (see Marshall, 1991; Johnston & Swanson, 2003a) that mother love is normal and natural, and that small children are special and fulfilling in a woman's life. As I pointed out, men are virtually absent from the child care role. Although Edina described how she and her husband took their grandchild to the park, no further details were given and he was not described as being either responsible (solely or jointly) for the child in any other context. Women as primarily responsible for small children remains uncontested throughout this article, depicted as reproduced and handed down across the generations from mother to daughter, even though there may be a new way to perform the cultural role of grandparent. I term the role of grandparent as 'cultural' rather than biological because this particular article demonstrates that there is a set of behaviours and practices to be learned in relation to this role and these are intertwined with what is portrayed as the 'natural'. This is the reproduction of mothers caring for children, expertise for which is handed down the generations, combined with the special, unique status that children occupy in Western societies.

Chapter 6: Magazines' presentation of celebrities 'coping' with the Ageing process

The cult of celebrity

Since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been public interest in the concept of stardom. This might be interpreted as an interest in the strength of a performance together with a desire to know about the lives of the actors and personalities involved (Tolson, 1996:120). So for any given star or personality, we become interested not only in the person's ability to perform, but what is going on (or what we think is going on) in their private lives. deCordova (1985:26), who has charted the history of the star system in America, suggests this type of interest started to become apparent at around the beginning of the last century. First, there is a type of intertextuality associated with the star's ability and performance which audiences recognise from, say, one film to the next (ibid:1985:22); then there are texts and dialogues linked to the star which are concerned with their 'private' life. deCordova discusses this dual interest as: '…two autonomous spheres that can be articulated in paradigm' (1985:27). The public/private interest grew gradually with the publication of articles in film magazines from around 1914 onwards, which began to be concerned with the Star's personal life, rather than solely with their professional career.

However, despite an ongoing interest in both the public/private spheres of 'famous' people's lives during most of the last century, some forty or fifty years ago, people were not as obsessively interested in the 'private' lives of celebrities as they are today. There has been a phenomenal rise in the interest and attention given to many of those in the public eye, and there are many magazines devoted solely to detailing the lives of celebrities. Indeed, these individuals' lives as 'celebrities' have, in many cases, completely overridden their status as

people who are famous for some artistic endeavour, such as a film or singing career. This has been a process caused by a number of factors, including the sheer pervasiveness of the media since the 1980s, together with a lack of confidence in societal institutions which arose at around a similar time. Certain events, such as the death of Diana, the Princess of Wales, or the considerable impact of the pop icon, Madonna, have also been contributing events (Cashmore, 2006:2).

Celebrities who achieved such status in the eighties (a crucial decade, then, on a number of levels) can now be firmly labelled as 'no longer young'. Examples of women fitting into this category include Madonna, and the actors Sharon Stone, Kim Cattrell and Andie Macdowell. But they still 'look great' and, importantly, they are still celebrities. They have become role models for the rest of us non-celebrity, older women because they are able to demonstrate success at remaining 'youthful', sexy and beautiful. Most importantly, they are still in work both professionally and are still written about as celebrities. It is also worth noting that being regarded as sexy and fashionable is not necessarily incompatible with power or professional status and, indeed, these phenomena often work in tandem with one another (Bonner, 2005:86). The celebrities I've drawn attention to above are proof of this and this is apparent in their media representations, including the articles that are the subject of the analysis in this chapter.

Moreover, similarities in the themes running through all of the textual analysis in this thesis will become apparent. As we have seen in the chapter analysing the article about Yummy Grannies, messages about a woman's role in Western societies principally as wife and mother (and then grandmother) are foregrounded as normal and natural in women's magazines and

this extends to titles aimed at the 35+ group. Women are centred within (rather than 'around') these roles, defined and identified by them (see Ballaster et al, 1996:88). But, unlike the magazines Itzin studied in 1986, today there is a much heavier emphasis on a 'career' as an important, and indeed an essential attribute for the older woman. In women's magazines this strategy helps reiterate a type of 'liberal media strategy' (Van Zoonen, 1991:35) which draws on the construct of 'Superwoman' (Van Zoonen, 1991:36), a construct that allows women to be depicted as having success in both the public and private spheres. In magazines for older women, it is all about maintaining an active role within society, reducing the dependency scenario that can be associated with older age. However, the way that women are positioned in relation to men and children remains virtually uncontested and is crucial to keep in mind in the type of analysis that we are concerned with. Furthermore, women celebrities are not exempt from being defined or positioned in this way, as we shall see in the examples I analyse.

What I want to demonstrate in this chapter is that the way in which these women are represented in the magazines is designed to provide the rest of us ('non-celebrity' or ordinary women) with a type of leadership or 'steer' showing us what it is possible to achieve (only, of course, they do it a bit better). Van Leeuwen (2005:56) argues that people in the public eye, such as celebrities, can be role models and they perform a type of social control by modelling or recommending 'best practice'. This could be in relation to dress, lifestyle, or modes of behaviour for example. We monitor what we do in relation to what they are doing. As they modify their behaviour, so we do too and we are alerted to these changes as they are described and represented in media publications.

The 'mediated persona'

There is another crucial aspect to be aware of concerning celebrities. It is that their status is entirely dependent upon their distance from those that admire them. As Evans (2005:19) states, they are simply 'representations in mediated texts' (2005:19). They may seem 'real' and familiar to their audience, but a technical medium is required to transmit information about them to their audience. It is their image that is transmitted. As Evans (2005:19) puts it, 'celebrity by definition requires mediation'. Circulating texts create a persona only loosely based on the real person. Thus it is a 'mediated persona' (ibid:19), not the real, embodied person that the audience has access to, even if the persona contains aspects of the real person, perhaps in connection to a performance they have given.

I would argue, however, that it does not matter whether a celebrity's 'words' are 'real' or not, in the sense of whether those words are related directly to the embodied person. What is important is that a set of values and ideals are transmitted, using their image or mediated persona as a vehicle to do this. With these points in mind, I suggest that the images of the women whose interviews are analysed in this chapter are presented to us as cultural role models, then, and crucially, working role models. They exemplify many of the current myths concerning women, including myths about older women, thus reinforcing some myths and solidifying them. But they also draw attention to the transitional nature of others.

Textual analysis

My argument and analysis is centred around two articles which appeared in 2005 editions of *Woman & Home* and *Good Housekeeping*. I will analyse sections from each article in turn, starting with one which appeared in *Woman & Home*.

<u>Article 1: 'Life just gets better': Andie MacDowell</u> (see Appendix T2)

The cover of the November 2005 issue of *Woman & Home* features the actor, Andie MacDowell, and it is an article concerning her that I first analyse. Andie Macdowell is an actor who achieved stardom and success in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Her most notable films are *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, *Green Card*, *Short Cuts* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. She was 47 at the time the article was written.

The article spans three pages: two pages of text and a full page colour photograph of Macdowell, which is placed in between two pages of written text. Superficially, it might appear that the first page does not contain anything very substantial to draw upon in exposing how ageing women are represented. It is the second page of the article that is the more explicit in this regard. Page 1 of the article, however, provides a contextualisation or a lens through which to understand the more overt statements or 'thoughts' of MacDowell that follow, as she discusses being an 'older woman'.

Life just gets better is the main heading of the article with four lines of subtext summarising MacDowell's stage in life via her current familial position:

Actress and model Andie MacDowell, 47, has been at the top of her profession for two decades. Recently divorced from her second husband, she has a son Justin, 18, and two daughters: Rainey 16, and Sarah Margaret, ten. She spoke to Stephanie Young about life, love and learning new skills

The title suggests that MacDowell's experience of life, and consequently, getting older, is one of improvement. She appears to be enjoying it more as time goes by. This needs to be

contextualised by her age (*47*), her occupations (*actress and model*) and the fact that she has been at the *top of her profession* for around 20 years. As I have pointed out, women are defined by their familial roles, as MacDowell is here because we are told that she has just divorced her second husband and has three children. Recall Ballaster et al's (1996:88) observation: women are usually positioned very close to the home both physically and experientially. Crucially, MacDowell is also portrayed as highly successful in the public sphere, exemplifying the 'Superwoman' stereotype of recent years that Van Zoonen (1991:36) draws attention to.

The opening paragraphs tell us about her life, following her divorce and her role as a mother. The first paragraph is headed: *On marriage…*

One of the messages in my new film Tara Road is that as wives we need to balance spending time knowing our man with personal growth. I can speak not only from personal experience but from watching my close friends' relationships and the point is that often in marriage you lose your sense of self. You just don't know who you are any more. It's so important in a relationship to maintain a sense of creativity and grow within yourself. I'm newly single and revisiting things I missed about my life and learning new skills. It's exciting having the space to rediscover yourself.

Heterosexual relationships are foregrounded. Recall Benwell & Stokoe's (2006:82) concept of 'unnoticed heterosexuality' and the presupposition that it's normal and usual behaviour. MacDowell uses the film she has just made in order to exemplify her first points (and indeed it is very probable that the interview is designed to promote the film). MacDowell states that: *as wives we need to balance spending time knowing our man with personal growth*. There is the assumption that a woman's primary role is being a wife, and this includes all women, as the inclusive pronoun *we* is used. MacDowell, just divorced is, however, challenging this 'fact' to a certain extent, because she claims that it is *common to lose your sense of self*. This

is a reminder of one of the downfalls of marriage, and helps to validate the position of being once again single, a status which will apply to many of the magazine's readers. This is described as *exciting* because you have *space* to be yourself. What could therefore be viewed as a culturally negative experience is being redefined as positive, as if it represents a new beginning. Here, the readership is positioned by the inclusive pronouns (*we* and *our*) as a homogenous group, a group which Ballaster et al (1996:87) observes transcends other relations of difference such as race or social background. It is particularly the case in these 'real life' genres that the shared experiences of readers and text producers and the person being written about is made evident (Ballaster et al, ibid). By shifting backwards and forwards between the exclusive pronoun, *I* and the inclusive pronouns *you, we and our*, MacDowell is able to validate her comments using herself as an example of 'best practice'. The use of *you* positions readers as people who will recognise the experiences she is describing and thus there is a 'universal' aspect to her claims. Moreover, MacDowell's use of *I* interwoven with *you* allows the reader (*you*) to become the independent, confident *I* that she herself has become, now that she is single and has regained her sense of self.

Some paragraphs follow about her role as a mother and her pain as her children have grown up and gone to college, her exercise regime and her neighbourhood friendships and the contentment she feels with her life at this point. The paragraph I consider next, which occurs on the third page of the interview, depicts MacDowell in a somewhat accepting and non-confrontational role as an older woman:

On Hollywood attitudes...

I think my relaxed attitude to the movie industry has meant I've continued working regularly. There was a time when I could be pickier about my roles, but I work in show business and it's just that – a business – so of course they're going to make what they can sell. The market place is all about young culture because that's who goes to the movies and I accept it because it's a reality. I don't take it personally, it's just the way it is. I don't think that bitterness is attractive and that's the last thing I want to be.

Note there is no challenge to Hollywood as a powerful media institution. It attracts no animosity from MacDowell, so work continues to come her way, despite her age. This is not simply about the acceptance of an older actress of her lot in relation to her employers; it is modelling preferred behaviour for all older women. Recall that celebrities as role models perform a type of social control by modelling 'best practice' (Van Leeuwen, 2005:56).

What is particularly important about MacDowell's interpretation of her relationship with Hollywood is her acceptance of the institution of Hollywood as arbiter and determiner of the way things are. The *way it is* is given as 'normal' and 'obvious'. MacDowell presents it as a 'fact' that in business profit comes first and *they* (understandably) must prioritise this (which results in less work for women who are older). MacDowell positions herself as understanding the logical, rational 'business' model of supply and demand and her place in the scheme of things. In this extract, MacDowell is drawing upon the first two Myths of Ageing in particular: that ageing involves decline; and also a loss of power. MacDowell has 'obviously' declined because she is older and therefore, economically, she's in a much weaker position. This extends, quite 'naturally' to other women who come to watch films, because according to MacDowell, films are made with young people in mind, and they feature young women actors as becomes apparent in a subsequent quote from her interview. Older women are thus disempowered in two interrelated ways: firstly, if they are actors they

will not get so much work; and secondly if they are film goers, movies are not made to appeal to them primarily.

Two powerful groups are described in this extract. *They* refers to the institution of Hollywood, an anonymous group, describing those who run and own film production businesses. Ironically (drawing on our own sociocultural knowledge), we can suggest that this group is likely to consist of a predominance of men, somewhat older than MacDowell. The second powerful group is named as: *young culture*, the movie goers. These two groups are represented as determining the status of women such as MacDowell and this is *reality* (according to MacDowell) rather than something that is working against her personally. Thus, the *movie industry* and *young culture* operate as selective and metonymic descriptions, standing in for a range of societal and cultural attitudes towards, in this case, the older woman. They represent entire 'ways of doing things'.

MacDowell doesn't think that *bitterness is attractive.* This represents a refusal to challenge the status quo, but more than that. It describes an attitude shown by any older person who might appear to be unhappy with the 'way things are': it will make that person less attractive. *Bitterness* may therefore, in this context, be seen as a possible by product of the ageing process: the fact that a so-called or perceived 'decline' in one's looks and status can lead to negative emotions, which must be suppressed. Suppression is important because older people, particularly older women, are expected to work much harder to maintain a persona which (if they are lucky) could be considered as 'attractive'. *Bitterness* as a behavioural characteristic is given as a state which can become linked to the physical appearance of someone who is older. MacDowell models acceptance of the ageing process and what might

come as a result of that acceptance as the more attractive option and consequently, she has continued to work regularly. *Bitterness* is also therefore another metonym, because here it describes a whole way of being that can affect the older woman in a negative way.

Following this, however, MacDowell does appear to question the cultural ageing process for women. Let us consider her points in turn before concluding how she has been represented as an ageing celebrity. The next paragraph is headed: *Having said that…* so we, as readers, know that MacDowell is about to question some of her earlier statements. She goes on:

I do find it odd that you have leading men in their fifties alongside actresses 20 years their junior. It just seems weird, but I think the pendulum's swinging the other way. Thank God for Demi Moore is all I can say. It's not that I'm interested in dating a 20-year-old myself, though I'm glad she's doing it because it's opened up the whole thing of what's okay for women to do.

Here, MacDowell is highlighting two points: firstly that older men can continue to get roles as leading actors (recall that MacDowell as an older woman gets less work), and, secondly, that it is acceptable both within Hollywood circles and outside for an older man to date a younger woman. The fact that MacDowell describes it as *odd* and *weird* indicates that, unlike her comments in the previous paragraph, where she demonstrated acceptance of 'the way things are', here she is challenging the 'obviousness' and 'naturalness' of a particular 'way of doing things'. She also draws attention to the actor, Demi Moore, whose high profile relationship is with a man much younger than herself. The readership is assumed to know the details (which are not stated) about Moore's life, and these details are likely to include those about her highly publicised and extensive cosmetic surgery, which is important in the context of what Moore, as a celebrity, represents. Women are, therefore, to be thankful for Moore's actions and lifestyle because she is leading the way for what will become

acceptable for older women to do (that is, have relationships with much younger men and to have surgery).

This extract highlights the place of celebrities in our culture by the knowledge we are assumed to have of them. They receive a huge amount of media coverage and details about their lives are assumed to be common knowledge. Celebrities such as Moore and MacDowell are crucial to our perception of the way things are, our social values, what we believe in and what is acceptable (Evans, 2005:2). And here (through the words of MacDowell) we are witnessing Moore 'leading the way' towards the acceptability of relationship with a (much) younger male partner. The Myth that Ageing involves a loss of sexual power is being challenged to a certain extent. Recall MacDowell's reference to the normality of leading male actors playing opposite much younger female actors. It is not only in films that older man/younger woman does not provoke much comment: films are mirroring real life. This extract also draws on the Myth that Ageing is a decline scenario, specifically for older women. However, an older woman's position as someone who is no longer attractive or useful within society is being challenged (using Moore as the role model). *Demi Moore* therefore functions as a metonym in this context because she is standing for several cultural ideals revolving around continued attractiveness and sexual eligibility (despite increasing years) and continued status and success.

Note also that MacDowell quickly distances herself from the idea that she herself might be attracted to someone much younger. This is important on a number of levels. To begin with, culturally, as has been noted, it remains unusual for an older woman to be in a relationship with a much younger man. Moreover, it is questionable as to whether sexuality and desire

are acceptable for an older woman. While sexual attractiveness is foregrounded as feasible for the older woman who takes care of herself, acknowledging sexual attraction to a younger man with the expectation that it might be reciprocated is still not behaviour that is entirely appropriate for an older woman. We know this because of our cultural knowledge and that knowledge is reflected in other articles which can be found in women's magazines such as those that are analysed in the next chapter when we consider age gap relationships in more detail.

MacDowell asserts that Moore's actions have *…opened up the whole thing of what's okay for women to do*. Thus there is a suggestion of transition or change concerning the status of what is allowable for some older women (but not all: MacDowell herself remains uninterested, or gives the appearance of being so). This highlights the fact that relationships where a woman is some years older than her (male) partner are not yet totally acceptable. Moreover, the majority of older women do not show an interest, particularly a sexual interest, in much younger men (at least, not publicly). The second myth that is being drawn upon directly in this section of the article is that ageing involves a loss of sexual power, particularly for the older woman. This relates specifically to MacDowell's distancing strategy from the idea that she, too, could be interested in dating a younger man.

The next paragraph is headed: *On flying the flag for mature women…*This is an explicit reference to the celebrity's role model status:

I like representing women who are no longer children. The baby boomers are all my age now and there's a large market of people who still consider themselves attractive. They're in great shape, they take care of themselves and they're beautiful but they're not 20 and they don't want to be represented by someone who is. I saw Christie Brinkley at the gym the other day looking fantastic and they are bringing her back because she gorgeous and because she's 51and people in their forties and fifties don't relate to someone decades younger.

I like representing women who are no longer children… Embodied within the actions and lifestyle of celebrities, such as MacDowell, there are the values, behaviour and beliefs of all mid-life women. Note also the euphemistic expressions: *mature women*; *women who are no longer children* which are often used in women's magazines to refer to mid-life women. These are phrases which avoid the negative connotations or associations of the word 'old' or 'older', such as dependency, lack of sexuality, loss of status and so on. By describing women that she claims to represent as *mature* or as *no longer children*, MacDowell is able to present a mild challenge to the idea that being young is the best position to be in. *Children*, I suggest, is used somewhat pejoratively in this context to describe a group who are not fully competent. Setting women like herself (and other older women) apart from *children*, allows MacDowell to foreground far more positive attitudes, of women as 'adults' who are capable participants in society. It also reiterates the 'Superwoman' (Van Zoonen, 1991:36) construct of success in both public and private spheres and foregrounds the new confident construction of older age that we have already encountered in the chapter on new grandmother identities.

MacDowell continues: *there's a large market of people who still consider themselves attractive.* According to MacDowell, people can still consider themselves attractive despite their years. The addition of *still* shows that attractiveness and being older do not necessarily go together and, indeed one can preclude the other. Moreover, the idea of self assessment is present in the words MacDowell chooses. Others might not consider this *large market of*

people to be attractive or beautiful, but they consider themselves to be so. Looking after themselves with diet and exercise are fundamental elements to attractiveness (*they're in great shape*), particularly for older people, who must work hard to remain attractive. This draws directly on discourses of healthy living and responsible self maintenance promoted extensively by governments in most Western societies. To a certain extent, the allusion of self assessment also sets up 'us and them' categories too, because the older group's evaluation of themselves may not be the same as younger people's evaluation of them. Referring to this group of people as *a large market* highlights the fact that the baby boomers are a sizeable cohort with considerable influence, not least because many of them are wealthier than the generations that come before or after them (see Huber & Skidmore, 2003), so they are worth taking account of, not least because of their material worth. Moreover, the idea of *representing* is important to the understanding of the concept of celebrity and its function as a role model. Recall it is the image or the mediated persona we have access to, not the real person and it is the texts surrounding them that create that image (see Evans, 2005:19). But it is the ideals that are projected through their representations that reproduce cultural values and ways of thinking.

Two role models have been named so far (MacDowell herself and Moore) and a third is now introduced. The former model, Christie Brinkley, is described as *looking fantastic*, *gorgeous* and *51*. This needs to be contextualised by the location that MacDowell saw her, the *gym.* Going to the gym (or a regular exercise routine) and what that supposedly involves (serious bodywork) is promoted for the older person, most especially because it is a crucial factor in the maintenance of a youthful appearance (recall the emphasis on keeping fit in Chapter 5 which analysed the Yummy Grannies). MacDowell goes on: *…and they are bringing her back...* Once again there is this unnamed and unspecified group *they* which alludes to the

institution of Hollywood, and perhaps product advertisers, groups who can determine whether older women such as Brinkley and MacDowell have put in enough effort to be 'attractive' and whether they are worth employing. Moreover, in describing Brinkley as looking *fantastic, gorgeous* and in linking this explicitly to her age also sets up the possibility that a woman might not be these things at 51, most especially if she is not found regularly in locations such as the gym. To a certain extent, then, this extract about Brinkley is underpinned by the Myth that Ageing must be resisted and that it is 'natural' to do so in lifestyle and activities. This can lead to evaluations such as *gorgeous* and *looking fantastic*, even when older.

... people in their forties and fifties don't relate to someone decades younger.

In this extract MacDowell is highlighting that the cohort of those in their forties and fifties is currently sizeable enough to warrant employment of older celebrity role models to represent them. She is also distancing this group from those that are younger more positively than perhaps was evident in her comments on her right to work in Hollywood. Setting up a construct of mid life women in this way, allows her a link to her next comments on cosmetic surgery:

I've never seen a good facelift…

I don't want to criticise anyone for having cosmetic surgery because it's a personal choice, but I've never seen a facelift that looks good. It takes away the natural beauty you have when you're older. You can't turn back time and be 20 again and personally I've no desire to be 20. I want to be beautiful and I want to be 40 and I want to be beautiful and I want to be 50. What's wrong with where you are?

In this section of the interview MacDowell challenges conventional attitudes to ageing and is critical of anti-ageing strategies. She doesn't want to criticise those that opt for cosmetic surgery but she is not persuaded. There may be practical reasons for her stance, however. MacDowell has a large advertising contract with the cosmetic manufacturer, L'Oreal,

advertising (among other products) anti-ageing skin creams. Therefore, she is covertly promoting these creams, which are marketed as an alternative to surgery, and using her position as the face of L'Oreal, as an older, glamorous, successful woman to be critical of cosmetic surgery: *I've never seen a facelift that looks good*. Use of *never* is unequivocal; she could have chosen to use *rarely* for example. Next, the possibility is raised that one has *natural beauty* when older so this appears to be a continuation of her questioning or resistance as an older woman living in an ageist culture. Advertising contract or not, MacDowell is still questioning cosmetic surgery as a strategy of age resistance. My readings of the stance of the magazines (and taking them to be a reflection of societal attitudes generally) lead to the conclusion that, although cosmetic surgery is more acceptable and common place than some twenty years ago, there is still a resistance to that age resistant practice. But MacDowell is not challenging the Myth that Ageing must be resisted, or that feminine beauty is desirable. Indeed, she promotes various strategies of age resistance very publicly in her advertising campaigns, for skin creams and hair colorants. It is more the case that she is promoting a less drastic stance and we cannot deny that there might be commercial reasons why she does so.

You can't turn back time and be 20 again and personally I've no desire to be 20. The first part of the phrase starts with a generic statement, one that is 'true' in any context, 'makes sense' and is therefore difficult to argue with (see Fowler, 1991:211). Biologically one cannot, of course, turn back time and become young again, but people do attempt to obscure its visible signs (via the anti-ageing strategies we have mentioned). This sets up the idea that, as human beings, ultimately we must accept the biological ageing process, no matter what (cultural) means we employ to obscure it.

MacDowell herself has *no desire to be 20.* She is attempting to convey that she is content (and beautiful) at her age and will continue to be so. She wants to be beautiful and 40 and beautiful and 50. MacDowell links *beauty* with the ages *40* and *50* and so challenges the Myth that Ageing is a decline scenario, although that has to be framed within the ideal of beauty, as a coveted, necessary female attribute because it is strongly foregrounded by its repetition and link with several age groups, including older women. *What's wrong with where you are?* Located within this phrase is the assumption that it is usual to consider being older as 'wrong' or unacceptable in some way. The question is thus an appeal to the readership, that they can feel comfortable with growing older, because they are being shown in the example of MacDowell (and her photograph) that beauty can be associated with increasing years. The link between getting older and retaining or losing beauty continues in the next paragraph when it was put to MacDowell that she was no longer beautiful because she was older:

A young journalist in Italy recently asked me how it felt to lose my beauty!

That girl was about 30. And the thing is, I don't feel I've lost my beauty. But then I don't think I'll feel I've lost my beauty when I'm 80. I hate this fallacy that you're only beautiful when you're young. It's warped. When I see pictures of myself 20 years ago, I don't think I look necessarily more attractive, I just look younger. You don't lose your beauty, it just changes.

MacDowell refers to the journalist as *that girl.* Referring to someone of 30 in this way, and in this context, is pejorative and carries with it the evaluation of a female whose status is less than that of an adult who would possess a full knowledge and understanding of how the world works. By her choice of signifier, MacDowell can stress the immaturity of the journalist. This is very similar to the way in which she chose to describe the group she represented as women who were *no longer children.* Moreover, it is worth considering the alternatives that could have been chosen from the paradigm set (terms for a professional

female) to refer to this person. Recall that we access meaning not just from the term that has been chosen but from those that are absent (Barthes, 1967:59). Consider, for example, some possible alternatives: 'that journalist' or even 'that woman'. Both terms carry with them connotations of a level of respect which, in this context, 'that girl' lacks.

The exclamation mark which follows the title of the paragraph indicates MacDowell's considered absurdity of the statement and is linked with the sentences: *I hate this fallacy that you're only beautiful when you're young. It's warped.* These statements draw on the Myth of Ageing as decline, particularly that older women are not attractive, and provide a challenge to it. Describing the journalist's thinking (and hence the myth) as *warped* sets up the proposition that the cultural myth is distorted, in fact perverted. MacDowell goes on to justify her point, using herself (the role model) as an example. Twenty years ago, she didn't *necessarily* appear as *more attractive* rather she simply is *younger.* But she cannot state this categorically: using *necessarily* indicates her acknowledged subjectivity and allows for the possibility that there may be disagreement on this point. Her final statement, however, defines her stance that beauty *changes* rather than it is lost. Moreover, in this paragraph, *beauty* continues to be repeated by being once more linked with another age group (being 80) to emphasise its continuing, rather than declining, nature, and, crucially, its status as a coveted, necessary feminine ideal. MacDowell is challenging the Myth of Ageing as decline in respect of looks and intelligence (recall her attitude towards the young journalist which we can infer from MacDowell's chosen term to represent her). MacDowell is also attempting to mount a challenge to the Myth that Ageing involves a loss of sexual and economic power: sexually, because she is proposing that beauty continues: economically and socially by using her position as a celebrity to pass judgement on the young journalist's thinking.

In many ways, I find ageing a great relief…

I was at the gym the other day and I always used to run at an incredible speed and I just thought, "No, I'm only going to run hard enough to get a good workout". I don't feel the need to prove anything to anyone any more. It feels logical. In your thirties, you're so desperate to prove who you are, what you're going to be, what you've achieved, all those things you think are so valuable because you think, "It's now or never". Because soon you're going to be 40 and you'll just fall apart. And it's a misconception.

In this paragraph, MacDowell attempts to make a case for positive ageing. For example, she does not have to push herself at the gym because: *I don't feel the need to prove anything to anyone any more.* Proving yourself is something you do in your thirties because you are so worried about reaching forty, which is a cultural milestone in Western societies. The repetition of the pronoun *you* is indicative of commonplace behaviour, assumed to be applicable to all older women. *You* hails or interpellates readers (Althusser, 1971), because even if they do not completely agree with MacDowell's interpretation of their life, they are being encouraged to recognise themselves in what is being mapped out or described by her. Moreover, by interweaving *you* with *I*, as MacDowell does in this extract allows her to present herself as an individual, who is taking a stand and freely making choices. When she switches to include *you* (the reader), *you* also become included in the *I* MacDowell has just described: this arguably presents a more powerful representation of older age; the woman who can make her own choices.

Thus, MacDowell is setting out the Myth of Ageing as decline as 'everyone' understands it and distances herself from it by stating that it's a *misconception*. To term such thinking as a *misconception* seems much milder in its criticism than describing it as *warped* which was the term applied to the young journalist's thinking in the previous paragraph. It is as if she is critical of the journalist herself for her direct challenge to MacDowell over her loss of beauty

but somewhat more forgiving of societal attitudes generally, where the Myths of Ageing can be explained as 'normal' and 'natural'. This is similar in some respects to her stance towards the institution of Hollywood and can be viewed as an implied acceptance of certain aspects of the ageing process.

I remember people telling me all these doomsday ideas about what it would be like to enter my forties and I keep getting older and it doesn't happen. I simply feel better. You're just as alive in your sixties as you are in your thirties.

Forty is a very significant age for a woman in Western culture. MacDowell does not have to explain what *doomsday ideas* she might be referring to: it is part of the reader's assumed cultural knowledge. *Doomsday ideas* is a metonym in this context, standing for a set of myths and ideas which come into play when one reaches forty, most notably that growing older is a decline scenario with nothing positive to recommend it. *Doomsday* carries with it connotations of unpleasantness and destruction: it is an 'End of the World scenario'. When a woman enters her forties, she enters middle age and this marks a turning point in terms of her decline and gradual withdrawal from the world. Gullette (1997:5) has highlighted older age as something we enter into, the entrance is a spatial metaphor and at that point, everything changes. Recall also Itzin's (1986) observation that women are defined in terms of child rearing and sexual eligibility: forty marks the age when their usefulness declines, because soon they will be unable to fulfil these roles, biologically and culturally. The new confident construction of older age, some twenty years on, questions the Doomsday scenario, but, as we saw in the chapter about Yummy Grannies, the 'new' representations of older age are not yet solid enough so must be drawn out and defined or commented upon as MacDowell is doing here. Recall also the point that myths are very often sites where struggles for meaning occur (see Thwaites et al, 2002:69) and this is evident because, as I have pointed out, there are several conflicting ideals and statements referred to by MacDowell which are displayed in

her contradictory interpretations of growing older. The main point that becomes apparent from what she says is that there is an acceptance and challenge occurring at the same time to different aspects of the cultural ageing process.

Thus, MacDowell's challenge to the status quo (albeit, a mild one) continues. She *simply feels better* because: *You're just as alive in your sixties as you are in your thirties.* Thus, there is the assumption that *you* (the reader) will consider that a woman in her sixities is less part of life than one in her thirties. This is important as this age range (thirty to sixty) spans the targeted readership age of the magazine and it also has the effect of positioning the readership as a homogenous group (Ballaster et al, 1996:87), no matter what their age is. The contradictory positions of challenge but also of acceptance of 'the way things are' can be explained by Coates's observation (1996:251) that we draw on a number of different discursive positions in order to demonstrate who we are. 'Tensions and contradictions' (ibid:251) occur when the competing discourses we have access to surface at the same time. So on the one hand, MacDowell can present herself as passive and rational when she is discussing the Hollywood business model. By contrast, she can be scathing and critical about the idea that a woman loses her beauty in her forties or that it is only men who can continue to play the leading role in films when they are older. This is an example which highlights the transitional status of being an older woman today. Some of the discourses we have available to us are more dominant than others. But no matter which one we use when we talk about growing older, there is always a reliance on the Myths of Ageing which remain very stable and structure our thinking.

The photographic image

The interview is complemented by a full page photograph of a smiling MacDowell in a backless, full length dress, which is placed between the two pages of text. The caption *"I'm revisiting things I missed about my life – it's exciting having the space to rediscover yourself"* is given in quotation marks to show that these are MacDowell's words, as indeed they appear to be from the beginning of the interview. The caption anchors the image, directing readers on the way that they should interpret it (Barthes, 1977:40), repressing other possible readings. Thus the photograph and its caption frame the interview portraying the very feminine (flowery dress) world of McDowell, divorcee, mother, actress. She is a beautiful older woman who is also sexy and attractive. Importantly, she continues to be very marketable. The photograph is juxtaposed with page 1 of the interview text. Thus, the title of the interview (*'Life just gets better'*) also provides an additional, complementary way to 'read' the image. Thus, the text anchors the image and the image anchors the text. Recall Barthes's (1977:41) concept of relay which describes the two way reciprocal process whereby image and text reinforce one another. The image and text are juxtaposed as a signal to the reader that the title of the interview, the image of MacDowell and the image's caption all mean 'the same', embodied in the mediated persona of MacDowell.

It is crucial that the idea of middle age is presented here as an opportunity to *revisit* and *rediscover things* and oneself. There is often an emphasis in cultural manuals on maintaining the status quo and we can term women's magazines as a type of manual, similar to 'How To' guides with tips on the best way to live one's adult life (see, for example, Smith, 2007:105). We can interpret the concepts of *revisiting* and *rediscovering* based on the taken for granted assumption that women should make great effort to maintain heterosexual relationships and

marriages. There has, however, been something of a shift from say the 1950s or even magazines of Itzin's day in that there is an acknowledgement or agreement that many relationships do break down and this may be viewed positively, hence the promotion of a sense of newness and beginning. Being single and middle aged as a woman does not necessarily have to carry a stigmatised spinsterish feel to it in the 21st century. This is clearly dependent on how a woman handles her single status and here, MacDowell is modelling being *newly divorced* very successfully for the magazine's readership. Hence, she is providing herself as a cultural role model for the many women readers who will be recently separated themselves. To continue with the theme of celebrities as role models, and how they handle growing older, I will now consider another article consisting of interviews with several well-known women discussing age. I will analyse extracts from three of those interviews in particular.

Article 2: Ageless Glamour: Jane Fonda, Lesley Garrett and Mariella Frostrup

The cover of the October 2005 issue of *Good Housekeeping*, in which the interview with Fonda and others is to be found, features the actress and political campaigner, Jane Fonda, aged around 69. Both MacDowell and Fonda have advertising contracts with L'Oreal for products such as anti-ageing skin creams and hair colorants and it was the cover shot of Jane Fonda on this particular magazine that directly led to the acquisition of the L'Oreal contract (see Appendix T3).

The interview with Jane Fonda forms part of an article entitled *Ageless Glamour* in the Real Lives section of the October 2005 issue of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. The article

consists of seven interviews with women of different ages. The picture introducing the article features portrait shots of each of the women with their age range captioning each photo (60s, 50s, 40s and so on). This is anchored by the following caption (see Appendix T4):

How do other women feel about ageing? Do they dread it, embrace it or is it something they simply don't think about? We asked seven women in the public eye, all at different life stages, to share their feelings about getting older and to let us in on their own secrets for turning back time

Other women refers to those apart from the self, the reader of the magazine. This is not to suggest that *other women* might form an exclusive category: on the contrary, the implication is that women form one, inclusive group with similar feelings and this includes the reader. This is indicated by the activity of sharing feelings and secrets in the common endeavour of *turning back time*. The endeavour needs no explanation, either of what it is or why one should want to do it. It draws directly on the Myth that Ageing must be resisted. It is presupposed that this is 'obviously' an important goal. Once again, we have women readers constructed and positioned as one homogenous group, sharing intimate details and similar ideals. What knits them together as a group is that they are women (see Ballaster et al, 1996:87).

Three alternative ways to perceive ageing are presented. One can dread it, embrace it or not think about it at all. These categories of thought or feeling are quite separate: negative, positive or neutral. The choice of feelings is presented as a simple, binary opposition, together with what is apparently a third, more passive choice. It is a three way distinction, but the third choice can also be construed as negative, because it suggests avoiding thinking

about a phenomenon rather than facing it. The process of ageing is thus narrowed down so one can either hate it or enjoy it. It is as if ageing and its many social, cultural and biological manifestations and implications can be conceived of as a single entity, which can be thought of as either positive or negative. There is no mention of the probability that women will have various conflicting thoughts and feelings about getting older, rather than one set view. All the Myths of Ageing are in play here (decline, loss of power, age resistance), as *ageing* and *getting older* become metonyms which represent a whole system, a cultural system, which is based on a chronological process, and manifests itself as an awareness of our ageing bodies.

Several groups of women are constructed here, as is often the case in magazines (see Talbot, 1998). There are *other women*, those in the *public eye*, in other words, celebrities. *We* (the magazine's producers) are doing the asking on behalf of the readership. The readership and magazine producers become a homogenous group (*us*) and both are a subset of all women, who *share their feelings* (as is 'normal' for women to do) and divulge their *secrets for turning back time*. Sharing feelings is therefore presented as a stereotypical activity that women do and this has the effect of presenting all women, particularly older women, as a united group: celebrities, readers and magazine producers ('we are all in it together'). It is presupposed that people would like to turn back time and that, quite 'naturally', we would like to learn how other people achieve this. Youth, once more, is the dominant, preferred position, and so 'naturally' and 'obviously' one expends effort trying to achieve and maintain qualities associated with it. Recall, however, Macdowell's generic statement that *you can't turn back time...* whereas here it is being suggested that it's a 'normal' thing to try to do. Perhaps what is being referred to by MacDowell is that one shouldn't 'try too hard' to look younger, which, as I have noted in the last chapter, is a negative evaluation. In this article, however, the concept of 'turning back time' is probably being used to describe attempts to

'look good for one's age' which is regarded more positively. Although there are seven interviews, because of space constraints, I concentrate on the interviews with those in the 'midlife': Jane Fonda (sixties) and two other women, Lesley Garrett (fifties) and Mariella Frostrup (forties) in this analysis.

<u>Jane Fonda, actor</u> (see Appendix T5)

The interview with Fonda, who is in her late sixties, opens with her discussing the very conscious way she:

...intended to enter what I call my third act – that is, post 60, heading towards 90, if I'm lucky...Instead of running away from the big 6-0, I went into it very intentionally. Facing it that way has made a big difference.

It is suggested that a sense of bravery, then, is needed, bravery to *face* something that one might (quite 'naturally') choose to turn away from (*running away from the big 6-0*), indeed, Fonda does not even say 'sixty'; it's called the *big 6-0*. Whether this contradicts her subsequent point (*I went into it very intentionally*), is debatable. Drawing on the three possibilities presented for how other women might feel about ageing, we can see how Fonda is constructed as embracing it and, moreover, embracing it with a full awareness of its implications (*I went into it very intentionally*). Note also that Fonda describes what is happening to her as something she *enter*s into and that she *went into.* Recall Gullette's (1997:5) point that we go into older age, and the point of entry is a spatial metaphor and marks a turning point.

All of the Myths of Ageing are drawn upon in Fonda's statement in various ways. That ageing needs to be faced foregrounds its negative status. Although there is no direct reference in Fonda's words to link them to the myths, I suggest that as the myths form part of a reader's assumed cultural knowledge, her words only make sense when framed by the myths of decline, loss of power and age resistance. Having said that, in this extract, Fonda is not represented as resisting ageing. Instead, there is a type of acceptance. However, she does employ age resistance strategies later in the interview as I will show.

There follow some thoughts about familial structures, how a women's role, and indeed her identity, is depicted as centred around her family. Here, that role is defined in terms of her grandchildren and being there for them. Recall the representations of Yummy Grannies in Chapter 5 and how their lives were shaped, not only by their careers, but by extending a motherhood role to their grandchildren. Something similar is being described by Fonda:

'Am I really going to be there for my grandchildren or am I going to stay at home and, say, read more?'

And:

... I have learned that when an adult – whether it's a parent, a guardian or a friend – is there for a child, it can really affect that child's life. I didn't do that for my daughter and I'm making up for it now. By being there for her children, I can be there for her, too. It also shows that change is possible – that I wanted to change and I did.

Thus, having a key responsibility for the wellbeing of her children (by *being there*) is highlighted as the most important part of Fonda's identity. Note that the roles a person may adopt as they grow older are being redefined to include more active (and useful) ones, an active grandmother role (as an extension of the motherhood role) has become part of that.

This was evident in Chapter 5 and exactly the same message is being given here. Doing the 'new' version of 'age' successfully involves activity, carrying on working, but also carrying on being a 'mother'. It involves embodying a discourse primarily of *being there* for others that are (much) younger, rather than *read more* which, in this context operates as a metonym, standing in for a lifestyle or set of activities which involve pleasing oneself. Note also that Fonda is critical of her own performance as a mother, but she has grown and learnt through that experience and is now modelling what it is to be a successful and responsible parent through the grandmother role. It is as if a new, more useful role must be provided for older women today in order for them to try to avoid the Myth that ageing involves decline (here it is by being able to remain effective in the mother role but for her grandchildren). The Myth of Ageing as decline remains in place, because without it, one cannot measure oneself against the new stereotype that Fonda and the Yummy Grannies are drawing out. Recall Perkins (1996:22) observation that we compare ourselves against the stereotypes (both positive and negative) that we encounter.

Fonda also defines herself in relation to men and details are included about her failed relationships and how she would like another chance to be in a relationship. This is in contrast to MacDowell's portrayal of herself as single and rediscovering herself. Fonda presents herself as having learnt and grown (just as she has learnt through her experience as a mother) through the ageing process. She has learnt that striving to please men and other people is the preserve of younger age groups (she refers to *the disease to please*). Note, however, that this is a bit of a contradiction to her earlier statements which foreground a role of *being there* for one's children and grandchildren. Fonda goes on:

...-the long-awaited realisation that good enough is good enough liberates the spirit. And, of course, good lighting is important, too!

In this extract, a feeling of freedom accompanies the realisation *that good enough is good enough,* although the second sentence is linked to the first in some way because it starts with the connective *And*. The reader is left to make the connection that (outward) appearance is still highly relevant (one wants to be seen in the best possible light, literally and metaphorically), even if the (inward) self (*the spirit*) is free from the pressures of wanting to look good. This is an example of the double-sided nature of the messages being given in women's magazines, particularly the titles we are concerned with here, which are aimed at the 35+ age group. On the one hand, there is a constant reinforcement of the message that one becomes more confident and consequently less concerned with trying to prove oneself; on the other, women are constantly reminded that judgements are continually made of what one looks like:

The other morning I was putting on my make-up, with a little mirror on the desk in front of the window – and it was like, Oh my God. But if I moved it out of the light, everything was fine. There was a piece in a British newspaper that said, 'Here's a picture of Jane Fonda three weeks ago and one of her today. There were a lot of wrinkles in the first and not in the second – what has she had done?' Don't they know anything about lighting? I can look 100 or I can look 50.

In the first sentence it is made explicit that light is responsible for highlighting wrinkles although wrinkles are not mentioned explicitly at the beginning of the extract: women are expected to have the cultural knowledge to make the inference. Alarm is connected with wrinkles (*Oh my God*), whereas the appearance of fewer means that: *everything was fine*. The piece in the British newspaper, which contrasted two photos of Fonda, together with the implication that she had perhaps undergone some kind of procedure to reduce the number of wrinkles, reinforces the negative connotations associated with ageing's visible and biological signs. Located within the word *wrinkles* is a whole cultural system: to have a lot is

something to be avoided. It is drawing on the Myth that ageing must be resisted. To have many wrinkles attracts negative judgements both from oneself and from others. Wrinkles are thus operating metonymically, and the reader's assumed cultural knowledge will allow her to locate the relevant connotations and myths (that ageing involves decline and must be resisted) and, moreover, she (the reader) will also know that one must attempt to obscure evidence of ageing in order to retain credibility and acceptance in Western societies.

Cosmetic surgery is interpreted negatively, although Fonda admits to having had breast implants in the past which have since been removed: her ex-husband did not like them. A lack of sensitivity is, however, cited by Fonda as the reason for their removal (*I decided to have them out – you lose sensitivity*):

The woman surgeon who took them out said a lot of women my age have them removed – I think it's because you're no longer defined externally

The *surgeon* is marked as a *woman*. The unmarked version of *surgeo*n is usually male. Thus, there is a sense conveyed that the surgeon herself understands why breast implants may no longer be required in a woman who is older. Fonda's position is that a woman isn't assessed on her appearance once she is older; and once that realisation is internalised, external aspects are unimportant. I would argue that the extract refers directly to the Myth of Ageing as involving a loss of sexual power. Since this is the case, why persevere with breast implants? However, *I think it's because you're no longer defined externally* contradicts Fonda's earlier concern over *good lighting* because it was evident in that particular extract that she was conscious of being judged on her appearance. There is further criticism of Hollywood norms where people's faces look the same:

The pressures to look good are enormous. You go shopping in Beverly Hills and everyone looks alike. People change any irregularity – there's no personality in the faces anymore.

The reader has to infer from her own knowledge of cosmetic surgery (which is assumed, but not explicitly referred to in the extract) that facelifts often leave people expressionless. This statement by Fonda is again somewhat contradictory compared to her comments concerning wrinkles. This is another example where statements of this type highlight the competing discourses a woman might draw upon to describe growing older. She may not want to look older but, at the same time, she may resent or challenge certain age resistant practices or ways of thinking and talking about ageing.

There follows some reference to the fact that Fonda had poor self-image for most of her life, because when she was younger, she was made to feel fat by her father, but she adds that:

I would say that now I've 95% got over it but that's because I'm 67 now and it doesn't matter anymore. I feel much more confident now.

Getting older seems linked to less concern but more confidence over appearance and self (recall MacDowell's similar assertions). Older people are not seeking the same rewards for looking good. And this leads to confidence, rather than insecurity, at least, this is what Fonda, and others, such as MacDowell claim. At the same time, we can also see this claim contradicts Fonda's earlier concerns about being photographed in the best possible light. A woman's interpretations and feelings about getting older are conflicting and contradictory: she may feel both more and less confident, not only about her appearance and self-presentation, but about the person that she is inside.

In the next extract, Fonda discusses health issues drawing directly on the Myth that Ageing involves a physical decline, referring to a relatively common occurrence associated with older people, hip replacements:

I'm lucky because I've never had any major health problems, except with my joints – I had a hip replacement earlier this year, which was successful. But I never envy people looking younger, I wouldn't want to go back for anything – the pressures are huge.

She regards herself as *lucky* which implies she has escaped a negative process associated with ageing, that of physical decline. She denies, however, that she ever envies *people looking younger;* note that she does not say she envies people **being** younger, which firmly links the appearance aspect ingrained in the cultural myths associated with ageing as paramount. The next part of the sentence where Fonda asserts she would not want to return to her youth on any level due to the huge amount of pressure, relies on the reader's implicit knowledge of what the pressures younger women face are likely to consist of. Fonda continues:

At the other end of the age scale there are too many women – and men – who are frightened of getting older and are in total denial. They do everything they can to stay young and end up falling between the cracks and really being nothing

Fonda is highlighting the fears associated with growing older in Western societies and the lack of acceptance of the (biological) ageing process. This large group of people (*too many women – and men*) are constructed as *they,* a group which Fonda is distancing herself from. This group (whoever they may be) expend tremendous effort in trying to remain young, but she depicts it as fruitless and leading to worthlessness. I would suggest Fonda's words draw on the idea that it is acceptable to expend effort in trying to look *good for one's age*, rather than being perceived as someone who is *trying too hard*. I note elsewhere and earlier in this chapter that *trying too hard* is a negative evaluation relating to the *mutton dressed as lamb*

metaphor which describes someone looking ridiculous in their attempts to look younger than their chronological years.

If you're lucky and you've worked at it, a sense of wellbeing can come with age

Pronoun usage shifts back to *you.* This is to show that what is being described is more relevant and desirable to *you* (that is, the implied reader) than those described in the previous extract as *they, who are frightened of getting older*. The ideal reader is someone who will be able to learn positively by Fonda's experience of growing older, foregrounding her as a cultural role model on how to 'do' age successfully. Apart from an acceptance of the ageing process, which is presented here as the correct attitude to adopt (which reinforces the social control aspect that can be associated with celebrities as role models), a certain amount of luck and effort is involved in order to achieve the alternative model of successfully growing older, that is being promoted by the celebrities in these articles.

You're not on the 'market' anymore, you don't have to worry about getting pregnant, you don't have to worry about being as appealing to men – and it liberates you.

A type of freedom is presented with becoming older and it is precisely because youthful attributes and concerns are no longer key. One is not looking for a man, one is not able to become pregnant, the worry associated with trying to attract a mate is no longer there. Biologically, it is true, one may no longer have to worry about pregnancy, but she is making an assumption that older women are no longer interested in attracting a man, and so they don't have to concern themselves with appearance as much. Yet again, readers are positioned (by the use of *you*) as particular types of people, who will accept and even perhaps look forward to this construct of older age. Readers recognise themselves (signalled by the use of *you*) and their position within society (Althusser, 1971) and are steered towards thinking in a particular way (not having *to worry about being as appealing to men*) now they are older and

the liberating feeling they are told will accompany that realisation. Why they might not have to worry about not being as appealing to men is not spelt out, but it involves a wholesale acceptance of the myths on which this statement is based, particularly the Myths of Ageing as decline and as ageing involving a loss of sexual power. So far from challenging the Myths of Ageing, this sentence supports them, because the freedom that is suggested is founded on the principle that attractiveness and desire, and an interest in the two, gets less as one gets older.

Women can get far more radical and free as they get older because they don't have anything to lose. So what, they can say, and just go for it.

The idea of becoming more radical probably stems from Fonda's reputation as a campaigner and political critic. Implicit is the suggestion that to be radical could have a detrimental impact on image, so is perhaps best left until one is older and there is not so much to lose. What women might lose, however, is not outlined but, coming directly after the last sentence, which included not having to worry about being as appealing to men, it seems to encompass youthful qualities of attractiveness and status. Older women are not bound by these constraints and so are able to act in a more risky manner.

Fonda, I suggest, appears to be modelling a very appropriate late sixties lifestyle for this historical moment. She occupies herself with her grandchildren, her writing and reading, she is not looking good for men, but for herself, indeed she has gone so far as to have her breast implants removed. The idea of radicality which she appears to promote does not seem to be linked with doing anything very different in terms of being a woman. It might be that she is implying that one can be more outspoken politically in the sense that even if a woman were criticised doing so, there is not much to lose in terms of status, value and, crucially, men. There are, however, a mass of contradictions apparent in her words. As one grows older, one

is freer and more liberated, but the ageing celebrity is also stressed about being photographed in the best light to avoid the visible signs of ageing being apparent to others (and to herself). There is, therefore, a very heavy emphasis on outward appearance in the interviews thus far, despite the fact that, on occasion, Fonda and MacDowell deny this is something that is important to them. Let us now consider how another well known figure, Lesley Garrett interprets the ageing process.

Lesley Garrett, opera singer (see Appendix T6)

Being 50 is fantastic. It has exceeded all my expectations. As I headed towards my 50s, I thought my life would be slowing down, but, in reality, both my career and my family life are going from strength to strength

This extract draws upon and, at the same time, challenges the myth that people reduce their activities as they grow older and engage in less active lifestyles, in preparation for becoming an old person (the Myth of Ageing as decline). But Garrett reports that the reality has been the opposite because becoming *50 has exceeded all my expectations.* It is *fantastic.* In line with the aforementioned Myth, Garrett thought her life would be *slowing down.* In fact, the reverse has happened: things have taken off both in terms of her family and her career. Garrett is also then challenging the Myth that ageing involves a loss of power, both culturally and economically at least. This is mitigated by the fact that:

Every decade of my life has been different but fabulous in its own way.

And:

So far, I've had an amazing career travelling the world, singing and releasing records and at each point in my life I've thought, I'm having the time of my life, but it seems to get better with age.

Thus, the fifties and other age decades are described very positively, and this continues as she details her successful, happy life. Garrett describes her *amazing career,* and how at different times she has thought: *I'm having the time of my life but it seems to get better with age* and echoes MacDowell's evaluation that *Life just gets better*. Thus an image is created for the reader of happy, successful older women, whose lives are busy and full. They remain valued participants in society, contributing just as they did when younger. The Myth that Ageing must be resisted is in play here, because Garrett is resisting the possibility that she might soon be categorised as the 'old stereotype' *sweet old lady knitting in a rocking chair* that was drawn out in Yummy Grannies and the connotations or associations that come with that construct. Garrett continues:

My appearance has changed with age, but for the better. I'm blessed with great hair and a good bust...

According to cultural myths linking ageing with decline in a multitude of ways, there is the expectation that appearance will change negatively with age. We know this because the adversative conjunction *but* signals a challenge to the 'normal' expectation which is that ageing involves decline. Garrett does this by using herself as an example, although she acknowledges some 'luck' is involved (her *great hair* and *good bust*). Moreover, these feminine attributes are foregrounded as important in the quest to remain looking good. She considers that she looks *better,* stating: *I'm much more confident about my appearance now than when I was younger*. Confidence in her appearance and self-worth for the older woman can be linked with high status, earning power and success: Garrett appears to have 'everything' including a happy family life. Again, we are drawn to Van Zoonen's (1991:36) observation of the stereotype of 'Superwoman' who is often depicted in women's magazines (someone who is successful in the both the public and private spheres of her life). Recall also Bonner's (2006:86) point that being sexy (or attractive) and fashionable and being successful

professionally are not always incompatible and often work in tandem, as they appear to be doing here.

The key to being happy with getting older is to learn and grow continually through life. You need to move on and accept that you will inevitably change with age

Getting older is presented here as a process where one has to adopt certain strategies (*learn and grow*) in order to remain happy. Moreover, Garrett tells us there is a need for moving on and acceptance of the inevitable changes. This has certain negative implications because *moving on* and *accept*ance are linked with not trying to change something. It is also implicitly concerned with letting go of one's youth. She goes on: *but what it is to be 'old' is constantly being redefined* lending weight to the idea or theme running through many of these articles. Garrett is also referring explicitly, then, to the transitional status that appears to be associated with growing older today. Moreover, readers are informed that:

Women are now told that that age is no barrier and they can do anything and I truly believe this is the case.

In this extract Garrett claims that previous age related restrictions need not apply. Who they are told this by is not stated, but I suggest that what she is referring to is the messages they are given through media portrayals, particularly magazines and this includes the efforts of older celebrities who assist or even drive this process. However, a sense of powerlessness or subordination is implied because women are being told about these changes, rather than instigating changes themselves.

I look forward to getting older. It's not something I'm frightened of. Here, Garrett looks to be countering cultural myths based on the presupposition that one would quite 'naturally' fear the ageing process. The fact that fear is mentioned draws attention to the negative qualities

of ageing, as evidenced in all of the myths of ageing. Garrett therefore has to provide an explanation for something regarded as 'normal' (that age is negative) which she is disputing:

When you're young, you're desperately trying to fit in, but getting older gives you the confidence to explore your true style

In a similar way to what was said in the interview with Jane Fonda, women are constructed (by using the pronoun *you*) as a homogenous group by virtue of the fact that they're women: they act and feel in similar ways (see Ballaster et al, 1996:87). There is also a confidence aspect which is linked repetitively in many articles to growing older which is viewed as a positive by-product of the ageing process.

Being young is depicted as pressurising as one wants to conform to cultural norms. Once again, there are pronoun shifts between *I* and *you. I* is used to model exemplary practice (that of Garrett's), while *you* indicates behaviour that is applicable and 'normal' for all women. Trying to become as good as or better than others when one is younger is drawn attention to here (*When you're young, you're desperately trying to fit in.).* This is something MacDowell and Fonda also highlighted, interestingly towards the end of their respective interviews as well (recall MacDowell's comments concerned not having to force herself to the limit at the gym; Fonda refers to the lack of worry in having to attract men). It is a kind of 'summing up' which provides a positive evaluation of ageing. Thus becoming older is depicted as liberating, linked to increased confidence to be oneself. And, finally: *Right now, I feel the best that I've ever felt*. Note the pronoun shifts back to *I.* This is in order to mark Garrett out an individual, who embraces the ageing process, but it also allows the reader, positioned by *you*, to become part of the *I*, the successful, confident, older woman that Garrett is. Garrett, by modelling best practice, shows what is possible if *you* take the right approach to ageing.

Ending the interview in this way thus affirms Garrett's position as a model for successful ageing.

The image of Garrett

All the qualities and goals associated with younger women are still present, encapsulated in the caption which is juxtaposed with Garrett's image: *'I'm blessed with great hair and a good bust'*. Recall Barthes (1977:40) concept of 'anchorage'. We, as readers, are directed to 'understand' the image in particular ways from the caption that accompanies it. The image is of an attractive woman in a colourful sequinned, dressy top. As readers, we focus on the features that have been emphasised and pointed out to us (by the caption). Hair and breasts are important feminine characteristics and their condition is often a determining feature as to whether a woman is considered to be attractive or not. And as readers, we can also see that these qualities may be present in someone who is older, but the right attitude is clearly essential (as modelled by Garrett's words in the interview). Moreover, while there is evidence in the portrayal that older women can do anything, phrases such as *I'm blessed with great hair and a good bust*, alert readers to the premium placed on attractiveness in Western societies. The conflicting and contradictory aspects of growing older are also highlighted. On the one hand, there is an increased confidence and an ability to accept age, but the emphasis on appearance does not diminish: on the contrary, it is still paramount. Recall Fonda's claim that *good lighting is important.* The importance of appearance, and of remaining attractive, is interwoven in both Fonda and Garrett's texts, as if it is an essential part of growing older and of successful ageing. I turn now to consider the last of the well known women, Mariella Frostrup, and how she is represented in terms of growing older.

<u>Mariella Frostrup, journalist</u> (see Appendix T7)

My 40s – a decade that some people find hard – have been the best years of my life

Frostrup commences with the point that the forties can be a difficult age decade. Note that readers do not need to be told why. Frostrup is drawing on the sorts of messages that Itzin (1986) found were being conveyed in women's magazines which were that women started to become far less useful to men once they reached their forties both in terms of child rearing and sexual attractiveness. Frostrup elaborates as to why, for her, these years have been the *best:*

I got engaged on the eve of my 40th birthday and had my first baby at 41. Life really does begin at 40 as far as I'm concerned

Thus, the two principal roles that Itzin (1986:128) concluded were portrayed within women's magazines as available to women until their mid forties (a sexual and domestic role) are those which Frostrup has been able to fulfil, despite her age. The very fact that Frostrup is mentioning her engagement and the birth of her first child demonstrates that it is less usual for these events to occur when one has reached forty. Despite the growing numbers of women giving birth (to first or subsequent children) in their forties, it is not 'normal' behaviour and because it is 'out of the ordinary' it is drawn attention to regularly in articles in women's magazines that are aimed at the 35+ group. That these events should mark a beginning in one's life is noteworthy because it reworks the cultural phrase: *Life begins at forty*. This phrase, as it is generally used, is dependent upon the idea that although, biologically, we have lived for forty years so far, socially and culturally, forty can be marked as a new beginning, and this is despite a person being 'middle aged'. Family responsibilities (that is smaller children) and job status may be resolved, and even though one is growing

older (which is culturally perceived as a negative in Western Societies) and one might consider life is finishing at forty, on the contrary, it can be a fresh start, viewed positively. Again, this phrase is grounded in the Myth of Ageing as a decline scenario and Frostrup appears to be providing a validation for the phrase, but one that is somewhat different to its original meaning. Moreover, the addition of *really* and *as far as I'm concerned* ('this is my reality; it may not extend to others') tells readers that there may be some scepticism or challenge to the truth of the phrase which is also confirmed in her opening point that some people find the forties hard.

Having children is a great distraction from worrying about ageing. It's certainly taken the sting out of all the things that are happening – my skin losing its elasticity, my legs getting wobbly and the fact that it's becoming harder and harder to stay fit.

It is presupposed that one worries about ageing: it is something that everyone does. Having children (a very time-consuming and important activity) in later life can, therefore, distract one from the negative, bodily aspects which Frostrup highlights as concerns, such as *skin losing its elasticity*, *legs getting wobbly*, and the extra effort required to stay fit (*it's becoming harder and harder*). These points provide 'proof' for the Myth that Ageing involves decline, but putting young children first, because of their cultural importance in Western societies, is paramount and what mothers (unquestionably) do. Thus concern and worry over the negative impact of the ageing process can be mitigated if one has more important concerns. However, when she is no longer so preoccupied with her young children, Frostrup feels:

...sure I'll have a crisis when the children are older and I realise that I'm left to contend with this body.

These ideas draw on Marshall's (1991) identified discourses on the socially constructed nature of motherhood, for example that motherhood is natural and fulfilling (1991:68-69) and thus one worries less about oneself. Note also how Frostrup distances herself from her ageing body, using *this* rather than *my* to describe her relationship to it. Recall Featherstone & Hepworth's (1991) concept of the *Mask of Ageing*. This concerns the 'split' between the age the older individual feels and considers her/himself to be and provides a way describing the process of exterior ageing which is problematic, while what goes on inside is the 'true self'.

As a celebrity, Frostrup provides a certain validation for having children later by modelling current trends for a career to take precedence over familial concerns for many women in the twenties and thirties. First, they strive for status, only having children once this has been achieved. As I have noted repeatedly elsewhere in this chapter, this type of female lifestyle is in keeping with Van Zoonen's (1991:36) identified construction of 'Superwoman', often portrayed in media representations. This describes a woman who is independent and successful in the public sphere and also in the domestic world. Moreover, she remains attractive. Once again, however, the idea that competitiveness and desperation ease as one becomes older is highlighted:

In my 30s I thought if only I had a certain dress or lipstick, I'd be a happier person. Once you realise that's not the way it works, it's quite liberating

The pressurising, competitive aspect that is often described by older women in many of these articles in relation to how they felt when they were younger, is once again drawn attention to. In the interview with Andie MacDowell this was apparent in the way she described that she no longer pushed herself excessively in the gym. And Jane Fonda drew attention to the

liberating feeling that can come with being older when a woman is not competing for the attention of men. Frostrup is doing the same thing here because clearly having a particular dress or lipstick in itself does not make a person happier; it is what may potentially come as a result of that which does: you look more attractive if you have these things. Thus being free of cultural pressures such as the need to appear attractive makes one feel free, although she regards attention to her hair as paramount and linked to growing older:

One thing that has become desperately important to me since I turned 40 is my hair and I'm sure that's to do with my age

In the next sentence she attempts to provide an explanation for this statement, although the pronouns shift from *my* and *I* to *you*, showing this behaviour as normal and applicable to all women:

In your 20s and 30s, you can go around with messy, tousled hair and get away with it. But once you've hit 40, you can't afford to look as if you've just crawled out of bed

It is possible that a focus on hair can be justified as it is part of one's body in contrast to dress and lipstick which are external accessories. Frostrup is defining allowable and permissible behaviour: when *you* are younger, *you can go around with messy hair/once you've hit forty you can't afford to.* Once again and drawing on Althusser (1971), the use of *you* steers readers into recognising themselves and adopting a particular construct of themselves as women who will 'obviously' become concerned more about their hair as they grow older and if they do not, they must be instructed to do so, as Frostrup has done. In the discussion of Lesley Garrett, I noted that hair is an important part of being a woman and is instrumental in judgements of attractiveness. The metaphoric use of not being able to a*fford to* go around with messy hair is important. There is the implication of loss, perhaps of sexual and economic status if *you* don't look after your hair. Another change is that:

I've also had to kiss goodbye to mini skirts. I just don't think you can wear them after 40.

So there are additional cultural norms concerning appearance that one must adhere to after forty. Giving attention to hair and wearing appropriate clothing are foregrounded as necessary behaviours. This includes not wearing potentially revealing clothing such as miniskirts, although Frostrup is not specific as to why one can't wear them once past forty: she doesn't need to be. What is encoded into the practice of no longer wearing such clothing is the understanding that readers are assumed to share: women of forty plus should 'cover up'. They should not engage in the practice of trying to attract a man. The 'best practice' Frostrup is advocating is a type of social control which involves relocating power to younger age groups and signalling this by the clothes one wears. Frostrup's views, however, contrast with the somewhat revealing image of her which accompanies the article. She is photographed dressed in a low cut top. The image is captioned by the words *'I got engaged on the eve of my 40th birthday and had my first baby at 41'*. Recall that the caption anchors the image (Barthes, 1977:40), directing us to access particular meanings. Recall also Itzin's (1986) study where she concludes that women were consistently given messages in women's magazines that their usefulness to men in terms of sexuality and child rearing declined in their forties. The image of Frostrup and its accompanying caption both support and challenge that conclusion. Firstly, it is supported, because we understand the image of Frostrup in the revealing top and its caption within a meaning system that prioritises sexual availability to men and values the ability to have children. On the other hand, Itzin's conclusion appears to be challenged because here we are presented with a sexually attractive woman who, in fact, got married and had children at forty plus. But we only understand the apparent contradiction because of the meaning system that is in play concerning the supposed decline in a woman's ability to attract a man and bear his children after age forty in the first place. Finally, then we can see that there is a double sided message being given. A revealing top may be acceptable,

especially if you have demonstrated your continued sexual eligibility and child bearing capabilities, but Frostrup considers that showing one's legs once over forty is not. Moreover:

you have to enjoy your looks while they last and not put yourself down.... I wish I'd been more confident inside myself. I look back at pictures of myself in my 20s and think, actually you don't look half bad

This indicates there is a decline with increasing time, because the reader (addressed as *you*) is positioned as someone who might easily miss her youth (as Frostrup perhaps did). *Looks* are presented as something finite which inevitably decline or come to an end. It is also a double message, not only to the older woman, but also to younger women as well, as Frostrup explains. It reiterates the theme of confidence which runs through many of the articles as something linked to older women. It is given as a positive quality, but what is less positive is that the confidence is often linked (and sometimes explicitly so) to an apparent decrease in attractiveness and a relief at not having try so hard. Enjoying ones looks *while they last* points to the transitory nature of appearance, given as a fact, which draws directly on two of the myths: that ageing involves decline and a loss of power (sexual in this case). Note that this assertion contradicts the thoughts of MacDowell. Recall her portrayal of beauty as a continuing (albeit changing) attribute at all ages and stages of one's life.

In summary

The changing aspect that is linked to one's looks is presented as 'biological' fact, impossible to escape, so therefore to be accepted. Thus, these women are modelling an 'embrace' of growing older (recall, an *embrace* of growing older was polarised with a *dread* at the beginning of the article). Embrace is, however, tied up with acceptance which, taken

together, may result in increased confidence as a benefit. There is, thus, a certain set of mental attributes involved with successful ageing as these women show.

What is ambiguous, however, is whether this confidence is present because one becomes less concerned with issues such as attractiveness, and so it is linked to not competing with other women for a partner or success, or whether it is about being more confident about one's appearance, including being confident that one remains attractive, despite the increasing years. It seems that MacDowell, Garrett and Frostrup consider themselves confident about their looks, while Fonda is more confident (or appears to be) about herself as a person, partly because looks and appearance are not relevant anymore. She may be depicted in this way because she is in her late sixties whilst the other three celebrities are almost twenty years younger. Cultural myths are once again at play, implied if not explicitly stated, that while it is possible to believe oneself to be attractive through the forties and up to fifty, at sixty seven one needs to discuss appearance and attractiveness as a past concept which is not as relevant today. None of the women are particularly critical of societal attitudes towards older women, although some resistance is apparent in the words of MacDowell and Fonda. Garrett and Frostrup, on the other hand do not challenge the status quo overtly, in fact they avoid it. What they do is to use themselves as positive examples of successful older women, both in a familial sense and in their careers. MacDowell and Fonda, both single, offer some resistance, but it is always framed by an acceptance of 'the way things are': that younger women have more choices in terms of men and success in life. Both these women are somewhat critical of cosmetic surgery, although they both fall far short of condemning the practice outright. Moreover, we have to take into account their advertising commitments for anti-ageing skin creams.

Each of these women is, therefore, in her own way, modelling for the reader a type of lifestyle which is possible for the older woman. Two of them are divorced and two of them are in traditional heterosexual relationships. Happiness, success and fulfilment are, nevertheless, shown as possible, despite the lack of a partner, as long as one places one's children first (recall that this was the first aspect discussed by both MacDowell and Fonda). Interestingly, Garrett and Frostrup do not mention their children in the same way, perhaps because it is taken as 'obvious' that they are prioritising them, not least by being in a traditional family structure.

The fact that these articles are being written at all is indicative of the way in which women are assumed to have a preoccupation with ageing, along with several predictable worries and concerns over their value as they grow older. We as women are being shown that it is possible to continue to lead an important and valuable existence, still taking part in many activities which are usually linked with younger age groups. This reinforces not only the existing myths (which, I argue, do not change, because ageing still involves decline, a loss of power and must, at all costs, be resisted), but helps to establish different ways of talking about growing older, highlighting the transitional status of older women today. For example, ageing remains a decline scenario, but so long as one adapts one's roles and activities to take account of this 'truth', then one can continue to enjoy some of the benefits that come 'naturally' to those that are young.

These articles are, however, subtly undermining because of the links that are constantly made within them which devalue older age groups and place great premium on the attributes that supposedly belong to younger people. Yes, women may become more radical and liberated. They may also stop trying to please other people (particularly men). But they must also ensure that they are seen in a good light, both literally and metaphorically.

Identifying with older celebrities

Hermes (1999:71) does not take the view that readers (or viewers) identify much with celebrities. She argues that she found no evidence to validate the idea that people model themselves on those who are well-known. It is more the case that celebrities become linked into certain discourses and ways of thinking or talking about particular phenomena. I would argue, however, that particularly in the magazines aimed at the 35+ age group, a certain amount of identification (or recognition) on the part of the reader with older women celebrities is crucial, for the magazine's commercial viability at least. This is very evident simply from the fact that magazines such as *Woman & Home* and *Good Housekeeping* always feature an older celebrity woman on the front cover and, as one of my informants remarked, these women celebrities draw the reader in (to buying the magazine). Readers know from the image of the women on the cover that the magazine offers something for their age group, thus they are identifying with the age of the women that are featured. I discuss this more fully in Chapter 8.

What I would suggest, therefore, is that many older women readers are likely to identify not only with the particular celebrity's interpretations and thoughts on growing older (the ways

they talk about ageing), and this seems to support Hermes's (ibid) point, but also with the fact that the celebrity is older. It is not the celebrity's entire 'famous' lifestyle that readers will aspire to, it is certain aspects of the way in which celebrities present themselves that allow them to perform the function of role models. And to confirm this point, we will see in the next chapter on age gap relationships that Liz Jones draws on certain similarities between herself and several celebrities (who are, like her, in relationships with younger men).

I would also suggest that some aspects of these famous women's lives probably encourages some women readers to expect more and to see the possibility of more from older age than the stereotypical granny drawn out in the Yummy Grannies article which formed the basis of Chapter 5. If readers witness Mariella Frostrup getting married and having children over the age of forty, Lesley Garrett having the time of her life at fifty or Andie MacDowell arguing that women are beautiful at fifty and eighty, then to that extent these celebrity women can be seen as 'positive' role models for continued success both in the professional and private spheres. At the same time, however, the resisting reader or the analyst will be mindful of the idea that the 'positive' versions of being older that we are witnessing as readers in the pages of these magazines are, nevertheless, highly dependent on the Myths of Ageing: decline; loss; and resisting ageing. Yes, the women celebrities appear to be challenging those Myths by their own self exemplification, but they are subscribing to the third (that ageing must be resisted) in order to avoid more traditional constructs of ageing. They do this both in their practices (face creams; surgery; keeping fit) and their activities (continued success in most aspects of their lives, both private and public).

Chapter 7: Mind the Gap! Age gap relationships

The topic of relationships is discussed frequently in women's magazines and appears within many genres. As might be expected, the topic often surfaces in the problem pages, but this is not the only genre within which relationships are discussed. Sometimes there are articles which consider crisis points in a relationship, sometimes relationship problems are referred to within articles on a range of other subjects, including that of age. This chapter considers articles about relationships where there is a significant age gap and the gap is commented upon as an important characteristic of the relationship. I will therefore use the theme of age gap relationships as a vehicle to demonstrate how the Myths of Ageing underpin sociocultural ideals about sexual attractiveness, and in particular that it is a youthful quality which can decline as one grows older. Most of the material I refer to deals with situations where the woman is the older partner. However, I will also examine an example where the man is older.

In connection with discussions of relationships generally and the way these discussions are handled within the magazines, one particular aspect, which has been noted by Benwell & Stokoe (2006:82) as taken for granted within conversational interaction can also be applied to texts in women's magazines. Indeed, I drew attention to it in the chapter about celebrities in relation to Andie MacDowell. It is the perpetuation of 'unnoticed heterosexuality'. This means that heterosexuality is presupposed to be normal behaviour and it is taken for granted that a heterosexual relationship is a desirable goal. By contrast, there are few articles which deal with homosexual relationships at all and even fewer in which it is considered as normal or unremarkable. By this I mean that when a homosexual relationship forms part of an

article, the problems that are foregrounded are mainly issues thrown up by the homosexuality itself rather than by relationships *per se*. Here is an example which highlights the borderline acceptability of homosexuality:

Thinking he'd had an affair with another woman was betrayal enough, but finding out it was a man completely destroyed me (*Good Housekeeping*, September 2006:30)

Why exactly the writer found the reality of her partner having an affair with another man rather than with another woman more devastating is not made explicit. Drawing on our own cultural knowledge which most readers would draw upon when reading a text such as this, we can suggest that an affair with a man is something with which the writer feels she cannot compete with. But there is also the possibility that because it is a man that seems to be more (sexually) attractive to her partner than she could be, it makes her even less of a sexual being because he would rather be with a man (in a homosexual relationship) than with her.

One or two exceptional texts that were found during the period under study included an article in an August 2006 issue of *Woman* where Elton John and his partner, David Furnish, who had recently made a commitment with a civil ceremony, discussed their own relationship and relationships generally with little explicit reference to their own sexual orientation. But these articles are very much exceptions. For the most part, however, heterosexuality is unquestioned as normal behaviour and the vast majority of articles take this perspective, assuming a heterosexual relationship to be the goal of most people, particularly women.

Within the context of heterosexuality itself, if an older woman forms a relationship with a man much younger than herself, then this is 'unusual' and can form the basis of an article, because it is considered to be interesting for the readership. It seems to be the case that a few years' age difference, whoever is the younger partner, is unremarkable, and is not commented upon. Once the difference is about eight years or greater, and particularly where the man is the younger partner, the 'unusualness' of the union may be commented upon. Sontag (1978) has drawn attention to the reality that in Western societies, women are considered to be sexually ineligible at a much younger age than men are. For the majority of older women, according to Sontag (ibid), the only possibility of a new relationship is with a much older man. Sontag was writing some 30 years ago and changing perspectives on what constitutes an 'older' woman (and, moreover, how she is perceived) may mean that this is not always the case, a point which becomes apparent in the articles I draw extracts from. This is in keeping with a major theme of this thesis which has been highlighted and exemplified in the previous chapters: the transitional status of older women in Western societies today and the challenges they themselves appear to be making to the Myths of Ageing. Their challenge is, however, constrained by the Myths themselves. This means that an older woman's interpretation of what is better or possible today, that could not have happened previously, is framed by current cultural 'truths'. These 'truths' promote the qualities and attributes of youth (attractiveness, being fit and success in the pubic sphere) as those to which people must continue to aspire to. The points I have drawn attention to in this paragraph, such as the sexual ineligibility of older people and of older women in particular, their transitional status currently and the challenges they seem to be making to the negative aspects of growing old will be exemplified in the textual analysis of the three articles which follows.

Textual analysis

Article 1: I love him – but can't have sex if I'm sober (see Appendix T8)

I want to introduce the textual analysis in this chapter by first considering a problem page letter. My aim is to demonstrate how getting older is 'obviously' linked to becoming less attractive and the issues that this raises. In common with the other two extracts I will deal with, the woman is the person encountering the 'problem'. But it is a problematic relationship seen from the younger partner's viewpoint and it is the woman who is, in this particular case, the younger partner. *I love him – but can't have sex if I'm sober*, is a letter which appeared in *Woman's Own* in May 2006 in the agony column, *Tell Michelle*. Michelle Maynard fulfilled the role of agony aunt in *Woman's Own* for six years up until 2007 (www.journalistdirectory.com). According to Van Leeuwen (2005:57), the guidance and advice of 'experts' is often disseminated via the media, and has replaced the function of religion in many areas over the last two centuries, for example, parenting, health, lifestyle and so on. While he says there are no explicit rules, only suggestions and recommendations that are usually given, it is implicit that advice should be heeded to avoid a negative outcome. With this in mind, I deal first with the letter writer's problem, detailing how it is apparent that age is the major issue:

I'm an attractive 34 year old and have been with my 46 year old boyfriend for 18 months. We get on really well, and he spoils me rotten

In the opening sentences the age gap is drawn attention to, although it is not commented upon directly as the problem. The writer describes herself as *attractive* and mentions that her partner spoils her. The juxtaposition of the ages of the couple, together with the additional

information (that is, her *attactiveness/that he spoils her rotten*) brings to mind the notion of a 'sugar daddy', a colloquial expression which describes the material and emotional attention paid by an older man to a much younger partner. To begin with, then, this representation is drawing on a stereotypical relationship between an older man and a younger woman, but so far, there are no problems (*We get on really well, and he spoils me rotten*). However, the complications follow, introduced by the adversative conjunction 'But':

But even though he's nice looking, I don't like the sight of his naked body and always have to have a few drinks first if I know we're going to have sex

Note the contrast between the writer's self-description (*attractive*) and her evaluation of her boyfriend (*nice looking*): they do not mean the same thing as becomes apparent later on. In fact, in order to ignore what she does not like about him physically, she describes how she must have a few drinks in order to sleep with him. She confirms her feelings towards his physical body in the final sentence:

He's asked me to marry him, and I'm tempted because he treats me so well, but do you think the fact that I don't find him physically attractive could cause problems?

The writer's boyfriend is *nice looking* but not *physically attractive*. What does this mean? I suggest she is making it apparent that he looks *nice looking* facially and (crucially) when he is dressed, but when he is undressed, his body is not *nice looking*. These two terms are clearly not synonymous, because one applies to the boyfriend and the other does not, depending upon the context. In this case, the context is sexual. Recall that meaning is

created along both the paradigmatic axis and syntagmatic axis according to the choices that the writer makes (see Barthes, 1967:65-66). In the first part of the extract, the writer has chosen to describe her boyfriend as *nice looking*, as opposed to 'ugly' or 'attractive' or any other of the terms which could have been used in this position (the paradigmatic axis). Once the idea of the boyfriend's naked body has been introduced, however, and that he is not considered (by the writer) to be *physically attractive* we know that these two terms cannot be substituted for each other and are therefore not part of the same paradigm set. Perhaps the paradigm sets in each case may be labelled thus: 'description of boyfriend dressed' and 'description of boyfriend naked'. Analysing the extract in this way allows us to see that sexual attractiveness is at the root of the problem.

What indications are there to show, however, that it is the man's age that is implicated in the issue? For a start, their ages are explicitly mentioned in the letter. That is the first clue, because one can make the assumption that, in contexts such as the agony column in a magazine, space will be constrained and only the important parts of the letter (or the problem) will be reproduced or summarised. We can see clearly that an entire letter has not been reproduced because what is written does not follow the usual conventions for letter writing, with, for example, a date and an addressee and so on. We are just given a paragraph headed *Q*, and one of the details given is the writer's age and the age of her boyfriend. The real key, however, is the photograph which accompanies the letter. This depicts a grey-haired, bearded man in a white tee-shirt, propped up in bed, next to a blond, long-haired, attractive woman, clearly younger than him, who is wearing a sleeveless top. The man could be in his 50s, the woman could be in her 20s. In this instance, not only does the text provide anchorage for the photograph; the relationship between the photograph and the text is complementary in that the photograph expands on the meaning of the text that accompanies it. Barthes describes

this relationship as relay (1977:41). It pins down the meaning of the letter and the problems it describes firmly in the direction of the age gap, without the reader having to be told that explicitly. It is 'obvious' that this is at the heart of the writer's problem. Moreover, the man is wearing a full tee shirt while the woman is wearing a far more revealing top. Recall that the writer is *attractive* and *34*; her boyfriend is *nice looking* and *46*. He is not physically attractive, according to the writer. Both the woman and the man are wearing suitably appropriate clothing for their age groups and their physical condition. Readers have no opportunity to make the judgement of who is physically attractive, however, because the judgement is made for them quite clearly in the photograph because when one is very attractive, and young, it is possible, in our culture at least, to wear more revealing clothing.

The photograph and the letter which, because they are juxtaposed (placed together), tell the reader to make a connection between the two, drawing on the reader's assumed cultural knowledge (see Montgomery et al, 1992:150). Both the visual and verbal texts are to be interpreted within a particular meaning system which relies upon the Myths of Ageing. That ageing involves decline, certainly, is apparent in the writer's evaluation of her boyfriend's body, especially in the photo: he must cover up. Ageing involves a loss of power in some senses for this man. Sexually, he is danger of losing his girlfriend as she is repulsed by his physical body. Note, however, that he retains some power because he spoils his girlfriend, possibly because of his material circumstances. Ageing is also being resisted by the writer because she does not embrace the physical manifestations of ageing, both literally and metaphorically. Literally, because she does not want to sleep with her boyfriend and metaphorically because of the way she describes his body in the letter.

What is also interesting is the way in which the letter is dealt with by Michelle Maynard, the agony aunt. The age gap between the couple is not mentioned at all. Maynard's answer is centred around the fact that the writer clearly has problems already:

A: If you're having to knock back a few glasses of vino before leaping into the sack with him, I'd say it already is! You've obviously found yourself a good man and are desperate to hang on to him. But agreeing to marry him when you've got such a big problem with the physical side of your relationship is utterly unfair to you both.

The answer is constructed initially in quite colloquial language (*vino* to describe alcohol; the euphemistic expression: *leaping into the sack* to describe sex). This has the effect of injecting a sense of light heartedness which draws attention to the 'obviousness' of the fact that there is a problem. The agony aunt's advice is clear, however: the letter writer should not marry her boyfriend because of the *big problem* with the *physical* side of the relationship. Recall Van Leeuwen's (2005:57) point, that while there aren't usually any explicit rules laid down by those set out as 'experts' in the media, advice must be followed to avoid further peril and that is certainly the tone of the counsel given here.

It is worth considering why the age gap has been omitted from the answer. To sum up, the writer has not explicitly said that the problem centres around the age gap between the couple. The agony aunt does not assume this to be the case either, despite the 'clues' provided by the letter writer. It is possible that to do so explicitly could lead to charges of ageism on the part of Michelle Maynard and, ultimately, the magazine. The clues given by the letter writer and, crucially, the photograph lead the reader to this conclusion, most especially because the age-gap has been exaggerated in the visual representation of the writer and her boyfriend, to stress

the point. What can be suggested here is that the reader is left to infer what the ultimate cause of the problem is and, moreover, it is taken for granted that she will understand and interpret what she is reading in a particular way, using her cultural knowledge which is structured by the Myths of Ageing and because of the connotations that are associated with those myths. It is even possible that the agony aunt has avoided referring to the age gap in her answer because she herself considers it as unimportant and wants to steer the reader into considering whether bodywork (diet and exercise) might be a solution. Clearly, age cannot be 'resolved', even though other culturally unattractive features (such as being overweight or unfit) may be changed through effort as is made clear as Michelle's answer elaborates:

You don't say what it is about his body that you don't like or whether or not it's something you think can be resolved – eg.,. through diet and exercise – but if not, it's hard to see how you can remain in this relationship without becoming as attached to the booze as you are to your man.

Age is still not mentioned in this portion of the agony aunt's reply. In fact, she points out that the letter writer has not been explicit as to what she doesn't like about her boyfriend's body. It is as if the subject of age is being avoided by both writer and agony aunt, but being drawn attention to in the image, perhaps because no resolution is possible. The reader is left to do the work and make the connection as to the crux of the problem. The answer carries with it the warning that alcoholism is a possible consequence of going ahead with marriage without resolving the existing problems. It would be wrong to suggest, however, that the message this agony aunt is conveying carries the warning that marrying someone much older than yourself could lead to alcoholism generally!

There is a strong, implicit connection between age and attractiveness running through the problem and its accompanying photograph. It requires socio-cultural knowledge and it draws directly (once again) on the Myth of Ageing as a Decline Scenario: that it is harder to remain *physically attractive* (although one may be *nice looking*) as one grows older. Physical bodies decline with biological age and however 'nice' a person may be, physically, materially and mentally, for the one activity that may be the most important in heterosexual relationships, sex, even being 'nice' may cause problems. In other words, sexual attractiveness is tied inextricably to age, for this reader who has written in at least.

Article 2: MIND THE GAP! (see Appendix T9)

Turning now to consider age gaps in relationships from the point of view of the woman again, but this time where she is the older partner, I shall discuss some sections from two articles. My aim is to examine the problems a woman might encounter if she has a relationship with a much younger man. Through the analysis of these articles I also want to show that by adopting particular discursive positions women can construct themselves in different ways, some of which are more assertive and active than others.

The first article appeared in *Bella* magazine in November 2005 and I will use it to consider how a woman can position herself discursively in order to display a version of femininity which could be termed as passive, submissive and sensible. The article takes the form of a report, *The Bella Report*, which in common with other articles of a similar format takes an in-depth look at a particular issue. This *Report* can also be categorised as a 'real life' genre, as it uses *Bella* readers as its main examples, readers rather than celebrities, although it does

give space to some celebrity age gap couples whose voices provide reinforcement or opinion on some of the issues raised. As I discussed in the chapter on celebrities, these figures provide a validation for cultural practices of all kinds, so celebrities who are growing older and are involved with older or younger partners can assist in the promotion of a relatively 'new' transitional model of growing older, where it is 'okay' to have a partner not close in age to oneself.

The article is called: *MIND THE GAP!* It alludes intertextually to announcements frequently heard in the UK on railway and underground stations alerting passengers to a larger than may be comfortable gap between the train and the platform edge. So the article is concerned with noticeable gaps, uncomfortable gaps that may cause problems. The subtitle continues: *When an older man marries a younger woman, nobody bats an eyelid.* No elaboration is required as to why no-one is concerned. It is the unmarked case, accepted and unnoticed. Recall the problem page letter we have just been discussing. Age was not really mentioned explicitly (although I suggested it was in the visual image), but I concluded that it was actually the problem. Older man/younger woman can also be 'normal' behaviour until some attention is drawn to it, for some reason, as occurred in the problem page letter. But when the age gap occurs as younger man/older woman, we consider it noteworthy:

But when Demi Moore, 43, tied the knot with her 27-year-old toyboy lover, Ashton Kutcher in September, it caused a real stir.

Few details are considered necessary about Moore, the actor; she is well-known enough among the readership of this magazine. Indeed, we have discussed her in the chapter on

Celebrities. Kutcher, who is some 16 years younger than his wife however, is defined more elaborately as *her 27-year-old toyboy lover*. Furthermore, the description of him trivialises the relationship as altogether less serious than the legality of their union (that is, marriage) would suggest. 'Toyboy', a colloquial term, is used to describe a young man who is good-looking and kept (that is, supported financially) by a woman who is older (www.dictionary.oed.com). The idea of financial dependence is particularly important. It proposes that there must be additional benefits for the younger man and that an older woman would need to provide something other than her physical being. Drawing attention to the fact that Moore and Kutcher's marriage provoked a lot of (media) comment (*it caused a real stir*) highlights the unconventionality of the situation. Moreover, according to *Bella*, it is because we are living in a somewhat liberal climate (either than other societies or from what has gone on in previous decades) that: *with our free and easy rules of engagement, age is no longer a stumbling block to love.*

No longer presupposes that age, or rather an age gap, used to be a barrier but is not anymore. However, an age-gap relationship is not yet sufficiently 'normal' in current society to pass entirely without comment. So there is a contradiction: on the one hand, the age gap marriage *caused a real stir;* on the other hand, *age is no longer a stumbling block to love.* The contradiction draws attention to the idea of transition. Some things are no longer quite as fixed as they once were, particularly pre-defined age roles, and people are able to break so-called unwritten rules or codes of conduct. Of course, there are no legally enforceable rules prescribing acceptable age gaps between couples, but there are social and cultural rules, although they appear to be less rigidly followed than they used to be which is what this article is trying to highlight.

The acceptability of age-gap relationships where the woman is the older partner is, however, also quite fluid. Despite the fact that there are supposedly *free and easy rules of engagement* there is still a questioning of the authenticity of such relationships: are they bona fide? The article asks: *is it simply a case of true love – or is someone's age part of the attraction?* Should age be a relevant or irrelevant consideration, or does a relationship transcend chronology? Do they love each other for themselves (true level) or because there is an age gap (superficial level)? Here, readers are being positioned as those who would be interested in the phenomenon of age gap relationships, celebrity or otherwise. Moreover, because the publication (*Bella*) is aimed at women readers, it's possible to suggest that women are being encouraged to challenge the Myths that Ageing is a decline scenario and also that it involves a loss of power, because it appears to be the case that if you are older you can still continue to be attractive to the opposite sex: sometimes at least, but not always. Recall the problem page letter which has just been discussed where getting older appeared to be associated with physical decline in that area.

The 'report' I have chosen to focus on is about Linda Honeyfield (58) who has been in a relationship with James (40) for 13 years. There are two photographs of the couple which accompany this part of the article. The larger one, to the left of the text, depicts the couple smiling and with their arms around each other. There is a red circle to the right of the photo with *18* written on it: the age gap in years between the couple. This, then, is the important number of years, rather than the length of time they have been together. The photograph is anchored by the title: *He makes me feel younger* and the subtitle:

Mum-of-two, Linda Honeyfield, 58, from Hextable, Kent, got together with her 40-year-old partner James Bottger 13 years ago.

Recall that anchorage is Barthes's (1977:40) term for the way in which a caption pins down the connotations of the image, by directing readers as to the way in which the image should be interpreted. Both Linda and James are smiling. This directs the reader to interpet *he makes me feel younger* as a positive evaluation. Note also that *Linda Honeyfield* is set in apposition to *Mum-of-two* and thus motherhood seems to be her defining characteristic. This contrasts with the women in the previous chapter whose high status careers were foregrounded. Careers seem to be more relevant in the monthly publications possibly because the targeted readership is of a slightly higher social class (although there is some overlap). Nevertheless, by defining Linda Honeyfield in relation to her domestic role, we can draw on Ballaster et al's (1996:90) comments that women's magazines almost always situate women in or very close to the domestic sphere, although there is some variation in those magazines which depict women as ambitious in the public sphere as well as in their private lives. It is also possible, however, that in describing Linda as a *Mum-of-two* her maternal qualities are stressed as an important characteristic, especially because she is with a much younger man, almost (but not quite!) young enough to be her son. Thus, Barthes's point that anchorage is a form of control which has a 'repressive value' (1977:40) is highly salient here as readers are directed to frame their understanding of this relationship, according to that of mother and child. This becomes relevant during the course of the article, as I will show.

Linda's story takes the form of a narrative account in which she relays the background information (her divorce at 45 and the singles club she joined in order to meet other people). She relates that:

When I got divorced at the age of 45 I joined a club to meet other separated people. One night a group of men in their 20s came up to talk to me. They pointed to their friend. 'He wants to dance with you,' they said. 'I don't think so,' I replied. I thought they were having a laugh at my expense.

Here, Linda follows social rules and behavioural norms by automatically assuming that a man much younger than herself is unlikely to be interested in her. She therefore gives a 'sensible' reply to show she is realistic about herself and her expectations. Note that the reader does not need to be told why the young men might be having a laugh: the reader's sociocultural knowledge is assumed to be sufficient to understand this. Moreover, Linda cannot appear to be keen; she must show reserve and let James chase her, both because she is a woman, but more importantly, because she is an older woman. Linda's description of events draws directly on the Myth of Ageing involving a loss of sexual power and the ability to initiate something further in this situation. It also draws on stereotypical qualities and cultural norms related to rules of engagement in our society: that men have the power to choose and women (especially older women) shouldn't appear to be too keen. It is only when James asks a second time (and directly) that she gives in and dances with him:

But then the young man introduced himself. 'My name's James,' he said. 'I really do want to dance with you.

Thus, Linda is able to justify accepting the invitation to dance with James because he has showed himself to be serious in wanting to dance with her despite her age. Nevertheless, she is ridiculed by her friends:

My friends thought it was hilarious. 'Are you going to take him to school with his lunchbox?' they joked.

The reader does not need to be told what is so funny. The possibility that a 27 year old could be interested in dating a 45 year old has to be explained in some way that is not serious. What is being suggested, therefore, is that the attraction has its roots in a mother/son relationship, the woman taking care of the man, as a mother would. Once again, little explicit explanation is required for the reader whose knowledge of cultural practices will be assumed: *school* and *lunchbox* will be enough to indicate a parent, more usually a mother, taking her child to school. This description of events exemplifies the Myths of Ageing as decline and as involving a loss of sexual power because a reason has to be provided by Linda's friends to explain the nature of the attraction. Linda cannot be attractive to James simply because she is herself: she is too old to have that kind of power, so an alternative reason must be found. Recall also how Linda was described in the subtitle of the article: she is a *Mum-of-two* and how this description immediately represses other possible readings of this text (Barthes, 1977:40). That is not to say that other readings are not possible, only that it is less easy to access them, because of the powerful connotations associated with such a large age gap, associations which her friends have already read into the relationship, and which need no further explanation within this article, because (drawing on their assumed, shared cultural knowledge) readers will also make similar ones. We learn, however, that:

...James was very persistent. 'Will you meet me for a drink' he asked. Eventually I agreed and we really hit it off.

Again, Linda demonstrates that she behaves sensibly and does not appear too eager because she doesn't accept James's advances straightaway; it is only after some time which is indicated by the use of *persistent* which is given as a characteristic of James's personality, and *eventually* which describes Linda's caution. James, however, is proved right because they get on well. Hence, the way the story is told demonstrates that the power lies with the younger (male) partner to determine the course of the relationship: it is important that James pursues Linda. Linda does not however take anything for granted because she continues to try to meet someone of her own age:

Soon we started meeting regularly. I still went out with my friends to try and meet someone my own age but no one I met could compare to James. I soon found myself falling for him.

The fact that she continues to try to meet someone older and closer to her own age remains unquestioned and unexplained; it is the 'normal' thing to do, perhaps especially considering her age and maturity. But Linda's feelings start to become evident as no one *compares to James* and she finds herself *falling for him*. Linda mentions the negative reactions of her children who *weren't keen on our relationship* and who were *embarrassed that James was so young*. Her friend also predicts: *'He'll go off with a younger woman,' warned a friend. I was sure she was right.* These extracts showing other people's thoughts and comments on Linda's relationship are important because they are probably indicative of societal attitudes towards those who break the norms. Note that James is depicted as having more choice as to whether the relationship continues or not, or whether he finds a younger girlfriend. It is given as his prerogative. The possibility that Linda might 'choose' to go off with someone else is not discussed: it is a far less likely scenario.

Linda doubts that James will continue *to want* her (find her sexually attractive) as she gets older, (‘*You’re not going to want me when I’m in my 60s,’ I told him)*

although he apparently says: *‘I’ll always want you,’ he said. ‘I’ll push you around in your wheelchair if I have to’*. Here the possibility of bodily deterioration associated with chronological ageing (specifically signified by the wheelchair) is highlighted. When she is physically dependent and thus no longer attractive, James says he will look after her. The case for ‘true love’ is being made because their relationship must therefore be based on more than just physical attractiveness and, thus: *In time I began to take him seriously.* Linda has been sensible and considered, which shows appropriate behaviour and characteristics for an older woman, and moreover for a mother. Linda continues:

James sold his flat and needed a place to stay until he found somewhere else to live. ‘Can I move in with you for a few months?’ he asked. I liked living on my own but I didn’t mind James staying for a while. It’s now seven years later and we are still living together.

In this extract, we the readers are provided with a suitable stereotype of appropriate behaviour for an older woman. The reason that James sold his flat is not elaborated upon: perhaps it is not relevant to the story. It is possible that the intention on both sides was that they wanted to live together but that there had to be socially acceptable reason for them to do so. Thus, James moving in is presented initially as a temporary arrangement (*a few months*). It is also important, then, that Linda stresses: *I liked living on my own.* She does not want to be seen as initiating the situation: James makes all the moves, first by showing his intentions are serious and then by selling his flat. Seven years later and the couple are still living

together. This is further proof to readers that the relationship is grounded and strong and can survive the test of time, despite the initial misgivings of Linda and others close to her and despite the age gap. Linda continues:

James is completely devoted to me. He gives me confidence and makes me feel younger.

The idea of having confidence is often expressed in women's magazines in tandem with strategies of looking or feeling younger, for example, women claim to feel more confident as a result of cosmetic surgery, or good fashion advice. In this article Linda claims that James gives her confidence, because he is devoted to her and this makes her feel younger. It is as if she needs the adoration and respect of someone representative of a more powerful group than she is in order to feel good about herself. 'Feeling younger' is clearly meant to be a positive evaluation in this context.

People often stare and whisper about us when we're out together. I get embarrassed but James doesn't seem to care. He's always cuddling me in public.

Again, no explanation is necessary as to why people might stare at this couple. It is assumed, therefore, that the reader will automatically infer that the situation (that is, younger man/older woman) is quite unusual which is why people would whisper and why Linda might feel embarrassed. James, on the other hand, legitimises the relationship by cuddling Linda publicly. Note, it is not reported that she cuddles him: he performs this action. Once again, readers are presented with a model of appropriate behaviour for a woman and especially an older woman. This is that her younger partner should initiate demonstrative affection, at least

publicly. The Myth of Ageing involving a loss of sexual power, associated very clearly with growing older is clearly at work here. This is sociocultural knowledge the reader will have access to and it is assumed by the text producers that this is the case. The reader will interpret this part of Linda's story according to this myth in particular.

One day the window cleaners came to our house to collect their money when James was in and I was out. 'I don't have any change,' James said. 'Isn't your mum in?' they asked. James thought it was hilarious when he told me about it later, but I was mortified.

Once again, in this extract, we are drawn back to Linda's friends thinking the situation was hilarious when she first started to date James and this is again tied into an image of a mother/son relationship. Note that James and Linda both show age appropriate responses to the idea that the window cleaners might think they are mother and son. He finds it very funny; she is highly embarrassed. If the emotions were given as being the other way around, that would imply that something was wrong because James would be experiencing the mistake more negatively than Linda and he is the one with more choices because he is the younger partner. In this context, James's trivialisation of the mistake can be seen as a positive (in contrast to her friends' comments at very beginning of their relationship, which implied a mother/son relationship). Linda goes on to provide two further very 'positive' reactions to their relationship:

My kids now really like James. He wants us to get married.

Here, Linda provides with very tangible signs of confidence in their relationship (by others), thereby proving it is 'true love' rather than a superficial age-based attraction. Her children now approve and James would like to publicly legitimise the relationship. Curiously, what Linda would like is absent from the text. What appears to be important are other people's desires and judgments and it is noticeable that these are people who are younger than her. For example, marriage is possible because James has initiated it and her children are happy. There is no mention of how much she would like to get married. It is taken for granted, perhaps, that this would be a woman's goal. At the very end of the section, James adds a comment of his own, represented as a direct comment, rather than through the words of Linda:

James says: 'There aren't any rules about who you should go out with. I don't want kids of my own – I like my lifestyle as it is. My friends and family are happy for us.'

He confirms that there are no age rules concerning relationships and that he doesn't want any children himself. This refers to the fact that he has effectively chosen not to have a family of his own because Linda cannot, not only because she has grown-up children of her own but, more importantly, because she is biologically too old. He specifically answers a question the reader may be asking about what might be considered a drawback of getting involved with an older woman: she is no longer fertile, so children are not possible. By also commenting that the people closest to him are *happy for us*, the reader is able to infer he does not face hostility to what could be considered a bad match. In addition, by using the pronoun *us*, the reader is able to infer that Linda is accepted by James's family and friends. That the couple have been together for so long and that their relationship is now accepted by those who know them provides further 'proof' that the attraction hinges on more than simply a passing attraction, or

even the mother/son relationship, implied at points in the article. The reader is also drawn back to the questioning in the subtext to the article's title: *is it simply a case of true love or is someone's age part of the attraction?*

While the contents of the article itself are more weighted towards true love, we also need to take account of the smaller photograph of the couple, also smiling, which is captioned *when we first met*. Clearly, the couple look much younger in this photograph, as indeed they are as this was thirteen years ago. However, what is important about this image of the couple and hence their relationship, is that James's youth is particularly accentuated and Linda could be, not just a *Mother-of-two* to her own children but to James as well.

Superficially, then, this is heart-warming account of 'true love', but on closer inspection a number of issues are drawn attention to concerning the dilemma women may face when becoming involved with a much younger man. The article defines what is appropriate behaviour in the circumstances: the man must pursue the woman, who should behave 'sensibly' resisting the man's advances until she is certain that this is 'true love'. Societal attitudes are displayed in the voices and actions and feelings of Linda's family and friends, the other people she comes across when she is out with James, James's family and her own embarrassment. The fact that there are reactions, and that the relationship is commented upon, both within this article (by Linda and others close to her) and, moreover, by the article's writers, highlights the unusualness of this story even in the twenty first century.

There are several ‘shorties’ which surround this and the other stories that are related within this article. One is a paragraph headed: *WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY:* This relates that:

‘Women who are past the first flush of youth will find the attention of a younger man flattering – and they could be attracted to his energy and optimism’, says consultant psychologist Ingrid Collins

Older women are described metaphorically and euphemistically; the word: ‘old’ is avoided, they are simply *past the first flush of youth*. This phrase could be used to intertextually refer readers to menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes. Moreover, it is presented as a certainty that women *will* be flattered if a younger man shows interest in them, although the psychologist is not as definite as to why as *could* hedges the assertion that women will be attracted to the qualities of *energy and optimism*. These qualities may function as euphemisms for sexuality, or they could signal youthful vitality generally, so there is the implication that older people may lack these qualities or have less of them and perhaps need to find them in someone else.

The ‘expert’s’ credentials are given in apposition to her name: she is *consultant psychologist Ingrid Collins,* and this gives her the authority to pass comment on such matters. Magazine articles (and indeed newspaper articles) often make use of an ‘expert’ to lend credibility and reliability to their claims. The expert’s comments are merged into the text so that it appears that they are reinforcing the article’s main points. Collins continues:

Younger men may be attracted to older women for their experience, while young women may be drawn to older men because they have more status.

In this extract, possible reasons are presented for the way a younger person would find someone older attractive: *experience* in the case of a woman being older; *status* for the when the older partner is a man. The 'expert' cannot be definite about this, which is indicated by use of the modal *may*, but nevertheless, it is a way of foregrounding the idea that motivation or benefits have to be present in order for the younger person to be attracted to someone who is substantially older. It could be, therefore, that younger men may be attracted to an older partner because of their *experience*, although at what remains undefined. Again it could be that *experience* stands for 'sexual experience'. By contrast, in the case of young women, it is suggested that the attraction to an older man might be because of their societal position (*status*). In both cases, there is an assumption the attraction must be connected with qualities other than physical appearance, which, drawing on the Myth of Ageing as a decline scenario, is assumed will become problematic as one ages. Finally, it is presented as normal and natural that men like younger women, because they demonstrate the man's desirability, as the psychologist states that:

And older men like younger women as they are like a trophy. They prove the man's virility and pulling power.

In other words, sexuality and attraction can be overtly associated with how older men feel about attracting much younger women, but when younger women are attracted to older men, it is not about sexual qualities (we are steered to the idea that it would be about *status*). Recall the problem page letter that was analysed at the start of this Chapter, which showed us

very clearly that the letter writer liked certain qualities about her boyfriend (*we get on really well; he spoils me rotten; he's nice looking; treats me so well*) but these were not sexual qualities. On the contrary, she had trouble with the *sight of his naked body*.

Article 3: Liz Jones's diary (see Appendix T10)

Next, I examine another example which deals with age gap relationships where the man is the younger partner. *Liz Jones's Diary* is an article which appeared in *Good Housekeeping* in October 2005 and is an extract taken from the book of the same name. My aim in the analysis of this extract is to show that, in contrast to the representation of Linda Honeyfield, there is an alternative, more empowered version of doing 'older woman in a relationship with a much younger man'. By adopting a very different discursive position, Liz Jones is able to present herself as independent and assertive, a 'new' older woman, who 'goes for' what she wants in her life and gets it.

There is a photograph at the top right hand corner of the article, of a couple gazing at one another. The caption: *I'm never going to be in the market for a boring old Hunter-Gatherer* is indicative of the article as a whole because it tells the reader that Liz is not doing something that is usual, normal or boring and thus, the slant of the text is that usual and normal are boring. Liz is challenging the status quo:

Liz Jones's Diary How one single girl got married

If you've ever fantasised about what it would be like to have a toy boy, read on. After years as a singleton living with her cats, journalist Liz Jones married a man 11 years her junior. This is what happened next

The headline above, which introduces the article, continues with the theme that what is to come is not usual or boring. It is presented as a possible fantasy scenario for an older woman: to have a relationship with a younger man. The fact that it is presented as a possible fantasy scenario suggests it is outside the realms of possibility, because the Myths of Ageing as decline and as involving a loss of power, render the fantasy simply that: something which is unattainable to most. Moreover, the point is made that Liz was single for many years, although she lived with her cats. To a certain extent, this sets up a spinsterish feel to the state of being single: an older woman who has never married and who lives alone with her cats is a very traditional, stereotypical image which can be conjured up either by use of the signifier 'spinster' or by including an association which comes with that sign, in this case, her cats. Cats can sometimes be viewed as child substitutes if a woman does not have children. Use of the signifier *singleton*, however, averts the unattractive connotations associated with 'spinster'. In some contexts, for example, *singleton* is associated with pregnancy (one embryo as opposed to more than one), so there is more a sense of 'things to come' and a youthful state, rather than of an ageing woman. There are five diary entries in this particular article. Because of space constraints, I concentrate on the *11 October 2003* diary extract in this analysis.

In contrast to *MIND THE GAP!*, which relies on an 'expert' to provide the explanations, Liz Jones performs her own self-analysis, using a newspaper article she has read in order to back it up. In addition, Liz, who has married a man 11 years younger than herself, contrasts herself with her own mother at the same age. Throughout the article, and in a similar way to the strategy adopted in Yummy Grannies, the comparison is drawn between the present

generation of women at a particular age, or stage in their lives (in this case, it is early middle age) and the previous generation. In so doing, attention is drawn to the idea of transition or flux in what it means to be an older person in society (and the roles that they perform) at this particular historical moment. To begin with, Liz describes herself as part of a new phase:

I am, it appears, indicative of a worrying new trend. I am independent financially…and emotionally, and am therefore never going to be in the market for a boring old Hunter-Gatherer or even a nappy-changing New Man. I am, like Cameron Diaz…Demi Moore…, in a relationship with a Gardener, as those helpful twentysomething toy boys - the Justin Timberlakes and Ashton Kutchers of this world – are called.

In this paragraph, Liz is able to justify the fact that she is able to be in a relationship with a man much younger than herself, the *toy boy* mentioned in the article's caption and again in this extract. She is both financially and emotionally independent, rather than its opposite, a dependent, a state often associated with women and older women in particular. She can choose, therefore, not to be in a traditional relationship or even with a New Man (a male who shares the childcare with his female partner). Her independence gives her choices which override the limitations of her biological age and enable her to become involved with a much younger man.

By highlighting examples of celebrity women, also involved in age gap relationships where they, too, are the older partner, she aligns herself with them and creates a justification for her own position. It is worth pointing to the fact that she places herself in a similar bracket to various well-known female actors, but although Liz is emphasising that she shares certain characteristics and elements of their lifestyle (that she is involved in the media; that she is in

a relationship with someone younger), it is debatable as to whether she is as similar to them as she makes herself out to be. By this I mean she is clearly not a well known celebrity or actor, who has appeared in many films, it is more the case that she could loosely be described as working in a similar industry, albeit in a very different role. Note that, as is common in the monthly magazine titles in particular, Liz maintains an emphasis on a busy career and financial independence, all essential ingredients for successful, new versions of older age. Moreover, by referring to the younger male partners as *toy boys*, she is able to foreground her own independence by suggesting that there is an element of dependence in the relationship on the part of the younger male partner (the younger men are less successful in their careers than their partners).

This is another instance where we could argue that the Myths of Ageing, particularly those which highlight ageing as decline or involving a loss of power are being challenged, as this is what Liz appears to be doing. She is successful and independent, and hence attractive to men, even a younger man. Moreover, readers are being presented with the construct of 'Superwoman' (Van Zoonen, 1991:36), the woman who is successful in both the public and private spheres. This immediately challenges the idea that the *new trend* Liz is part of is *worrying*. Liz is being humorous in her writing, but she is also foregrounding the possibility that some people might be concerned about the changes that are evidently taking place (and are described in articles such as the one she refers to and also the one we are discussing) because these changes may pose a threat to the existing status quo and the more powerful status the younger generation currently occupies, both in terms of career and ability to attract a mate.

Note, however, that this representation (the publicly successful older woman) is in sharp contrast to that of Linda Honeyfield who we have just discussed. Recall that her life in the public sphere was not really referred to. The mother/son association may have been one reason. Linda was defined as a *mum of two* and this definition of her appears to have been foregrounded in order to set up the possibility that this relationship may share similar traits to the type of relationship a mother has with her (male) child. It may also be (as I have noted) that this has something to do with the publication each article appeared in. The article about Liz appears in a 'monthly' and these seem to place more emphasis on success in the public sphere than the 'weeklies' (where the extract about Linda was found). The targeted readership of the monthlies is more middle class than that of the weeklies (see Chapter 2 where readership profiles are described in more detail). To return to the article, then, Liz continues by citing a newspaper article concerning older women:

The article added that women can 'look confusingly young. You can be 10 years older than your boyfriend and still look the same age',

In this extract, Liz is using the article she refers to in order to make a case for her own continued 'youthfulness', despite her chronological age. Liz alludes to a 'uni-age behavioural style', a merging of the age boundaries in dress, behaviour and attitude which is prevalent in contemporary Western societies (see Meyrowtiz 1985:249; Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991). I would also add that by including this extract, the attributes of youth are once again foregrounded as desirable, or at the very least, that the article is suggesting that it is not desirable to look older than one's male partner. However, the inclusion of the modal *can*, repeated twice, shows that it is possible to look *confusingly young* but that it is not a certainty that all older women will manage to achieve this. This idea draws on the Myth that

Ageing must be resisted and some women will be successful in their efforts to do this, while others may not be. To be successful may lead to a relationship with a younger man. Her husband, however, describes her in another way:

I asked The Husband if he thinks I look confusingly young. 'Ummmm', he said, 'You are good for your age, but it's obvious you are much older than I am.'

He evaluates his wife by saying that: *you are good for your age*, but not necessarily as looking younger than her age. Recall that looking good for one's age is a positive evaluation which appears frequently in women's magazines and there are particular meanings and connotations embedded within the phrase; it refers to people (and women in particular) who have taken care of themselves, engaged in bodywork and maintenance, but have not tried 'too hard' to look much younger than they really are. Moreover, Liz's husband's words suggest that he is trying to distance himself from her age group by evaluating himself as very evidently much younger than she is. The distancing element is important because it highlights the negativity associated with growing older and draws directly upon all of the Myths of Ageing, as decline, as symbolising a loss of power and of growing older as something that must be resisted at all costs. It seems, then, that to look good for one's age may be 'positive' in the sense that one looks 'good', possibly attractive (as judged by others), but there is still an element of remaining in one's place: one is older but evaluated as looking good *despite* one's chronological years. This is because older age is a very negative marker in Western societies, the evidence for which can be seen in the articles I analyse in this thesis and countless others which are repeated constantly and consistently in women's magazines. Liz continues:

He then added that he has always fancied Helen Mirren; interesting, but not particularly helpful.

This is an odd comment for Liz to include. It seems to describe her husband's attitude which appears to be that he can be attracted to older women (using Helen Mirren as a metonym to stand for the category of those who look *good for their age*). The fact that Liz does not find the comment helpful might indicate that she does not like the idea that her husband can fancy other women, or it could be that, to her, he is not supplying a reasonable explanation, or enough confirmation, of why he is attracted to her. It could also indicate that Liz does not identify herself with Helen Mirren, who is some twenty years older than she is. Recall that towards the beginning of the article, Liz did, however, seem able to associate herself with Cameron Diaz and Demi Moore, both substantially younger than Mirren. A merging of age-boundaries and the similarities of styles, attitudes and behaviour leads Liz to now consider what exactly has changed in recent decades:

I was looking at a picture of my mum the other day, holding me at my christening. She had her hair in a neat top knot and was wearing a black skirt suit, court shoes and stockings. She had probably, earlier that day, baked a Victoria sponge. She was exactly the same age as I am now, but looking down I am at this moment wearing plain Maharishi combats that are falling off my hips, a tiny black Prada T-shirt, Brazilian flip-flops and a toe ring. I don't own a pair of tights, a bra or a lipstick, but I do own the new Kings of Leon album…I squeeze in three visits to Holmes Place gym during the week (the only thing my mum probably did three times a week was buy lard)…

Thus, Liz is using her mother to draw a comparison to the changing role and position of women, particularly older women in contemporary society. She paints a picture of changing

dress styles and activities: her mother in formal neat attire, at her christening, having earlier baked a particular type of traditional cake. Liz, by contrast, dresses in casual youthful clothes and does regular exercise. The difference between Liz and her mother at the same age is emphasised, therefore, in terms of lifestyle and activities. The description of Liz is more detailed and is arranged as if she has herself only just become aware of the differences now. She wants to describe them in order to demonstrate, both to herself and to the reader that conceptions of femininity and of being middle-aged have changed in the last few decades. Arguably Liz is conjuring up a type of fantasy image of the mid-life today and yesterday for the reader to compare. The image is designed to portray Liz as a favourable (mid life) model.

Note that Liz does not know for sure that her mother had just baked a Victoria sponge; she is speculating that she might have. She is also not sure that the only regular activity that her mother performed was to buy lard (both indicated by the use of *probably*). Nevertheless, she includes these details in order to draw a contrast between a woman's place in previous generations and her own standing in the world. By giving her mother's only regular activity as a trip to buy *lard*, Liz is evidently referring to the lack of fitness of previous generations, using *lard* to intertextually draw attention to fat, unfit people, and the type of food they might eat. Thus, baking a *Victoria sponge* and *lard* operate as metonyms, standing for the lifestyle and activities of middle-aged women some forty years ago. Note, on the other hand, that Liz *squeezes in* three visits to the gym, which implies that her days are both busy and full, and her focus is on a healthy lifestyle. She makes the point that she doesn't possess 'traditional' female items (bra, lipstick, tights) but she does wear tiny (designer) tee shirts, a toe ring, and, moreover, she owns a contemporary pop album. To a certain extent, then, Liz is distancing herself from a particular version of femininity while at the same time, associating herself with

another, more bohemian, less traditional model, but one which is, nevertheless, a youthful and feminine model.

These facts, together with the details of her appearance and attire, show that Liz can continue to claim membership to youth and youthful activities, especially because of the body maintenance work she is prepared to put in. Moreover, she details the extent of her body maintenance activities (*I go running around London Fields at the weekend to stave off osteoporosis at the risk of being brutally murdered*) to demonstrate how much effort is required for successful ageing and hence her ability to attract a much younger man. One is prepared (or should be prepared) to take huge personal risks in order to resist the ageing process. Her reward for all of this is that she is able to be in a relationship with a much younger man.

By drawing on the image of her own mother, Liz is, to a certain extent, using the same strategy as was apparent in the article on Yummy Grannies (recall the *sweet old lady knitting in a rocking chair*). She is constructing an old fashioned stereotype which she herself and readers can measure themselves against. As Perkins (1996:22) tells us, we measure ourselves against the stereotypes that we are presented with. Moreover, stereotypes are very selective, describing groups in ways which are problematic, partly because stereotypes exaggerate defining qualities. Thus Liz's mother is being presented as a stereotype of the previous generation of women when they were in their forties, centred around and defined by the domestic sphere, wearing age appropriate clothing (*neat hair, black suit, stockings*).

As in the case of the Yummy Grannies, the old stereotype is used to make a contrast with the new model which is being defined and drawn out here (this time, of someone who is in their forties). Liz is at once drawing upon and challenging the Myths of Ageing in what she describes. She appears to be challenging Ageing as decline and as involving a loss of power. She is not, however, challenging the Myth that Ageing must be resisted because her activities and way of life shows she is doing all she can to resist ageing, or being thought of as an older woman. But it is precisely because Liz is subscribing to the third myth that she is not really challenging the other two. This is because by resisting ageing and employing strategies such as keeping fit in order to do so, Liz shows that she is actually accepting the other two Myths. Note, however, that there is some humour attached to the way in which Liz constructs her own self analysis. These take the form of exaggerated characteristics used to describe her lifestyle. Thus, in the sentence: *I go running around London Fields at the weekend to stave of osteoporosis at the risk of being brutally murdered, Osteoporosis*, which is clearly an extreme (or an exaggerated characteristic), functions as a metonym, standing in for the decline that is associated with old age and this is set against the possibility *of being brutally murdered*. Although Liz is obviously being less than serious in her descriptions, she is still making the point that large efforts may be required in order to resist ageing, and this highlights the value and premium placed on a youthful appearance. Liz continues, however by questioning her own life:

But perhaps I am starting to look like mutton dressed as lamb

This is a common, fixed phrase which refers to an older woman who is considered to be dressing inappropriately for her age, in styles that are too youthful for her. As Mills

(1995:129-30) points out, older men are not referred to by using this phrase. Not only does a phrase such as this one work on a metaphorical level (using 'mutton' to mean 'older women'), but it is difficult to disagree with its content or ideology because the phrase is so common in society and the connotations and meanings that are embedded in it are 'naturalised' (Mills, ibid). The phrase, 'mutton dressed as lamb', occurs frequently in women's magazines, either as an evaluation of other women specifically, or it is voiced as a concern by women, worried that they way they want to dress will result in them being perceived negatively by others.

I asked The Husband if he would have asked me out if he had known how old I was from the outset. 'Probably not,' he says…but it's too late now. I have to hang around in case you break your hip…

By including these details of a (perhaps fictional) conversation between her and her husband, Liz is able to prove to her readers (who cannot actually see her) that she looks and acts younger than someone of her age because her husband was unaware of her true age when he first asked her out. Societal attitudes to age, age gap relationships and to older women generally are apparent in her husband's reply: he suggests, perhaps in humour, or perhaps lightly with an underlying seriousness to it, that he wouldn't have taken things further if he had known her true age. But now the relationship has evolved between them, and, as in the case of James and Linda, he is prepared to look after Liz as her physical body deteriorates with age.

Liz Jones's diary reveals traces of insecurity and a lack of confidence in her own position, although it is not as overt as in the case of Linda (Mind the Gap). Her insecurity is apparent,

despite the opening sentences of the journal entry where she describes herself as independent, both financially and emotionally (suggesting she is not reliant on anybody). However, while Linda is upfront about her insecurities (*He gives me confidence*) by contrast, Liz's position is less transparent. It involves consideration of why she goes to such lengths to distinguish, differentiate and distance herself from the previous generation of women, as symbolised by her mother. However, this is not dissimilar to the Yummy Grannies, where two of the women explicitly drew on stereotypical old grannies in order to distance themselves and to demonstrate that they are different.

Liz portrays herself as a sexually attractive woman, who, superficially at least, is 'younger' in attitudes, behaviour, dress and lifestyle than her chronological age would suggest. Moreover, the deception (or confusion, as it is termed) is complete. Liz has been able to attract and form a relationship with someone much younger than herself, someone who loves her for herself. Although he was not aware of her age initially, he is now and he is prepared to take care of Liz should this become necessary, as her body ages.

Liz's insecurity is also revealed both by the comparison of herself to her own mother, which depicts her (Liz) as more modern, younger in thought, activities and dress, but is nevertheless followed by a questioning of her own status: *But perhaps I am starting to look like mutton dressed as lamb.* This is juxtaposed with, although only paratactically, linked to: I *admit I have started to hanker after the Inspector Morse box set* which functions as a type of 'confession' or orientation towards behaviour in keeping with her own chronological age group, rather than the age she thinks she looks. Thus, the *Inspector Morse box set* (which

refers to the DVD collection of the TV series) functions as a type of metonym, standing in for 'what older people like to do'.

In summary

In my analysis of these three extracts I have demonstrated that age gaps in relationships are seen to be problematic. The fact that the topic is being written about and discussed indicates that age gaps are noteworthy and interesting to the readership and this is the case from several perspectives. They are noteworthy because they are not common and they are interesting because there is an assumption that the dynamics will be different from relationships where there is little or no age difference between the partners, in other words that there will be issues or ' problems'. 'Problems' do not only occur when the woman is the older partner, as can be seen by the first analysis (the problem page letter).

There are, however, common 'issues' highlighted by all of the texts. For example, there is an assumed and taken for granted bodily deterioration that accompanies physical ageing. This is linked to feelings of revulsion towards the ageing body, as an extreme, and to feelings of worry of physical incapacity in later life, both of which draw directly on the Myth of Ageing as decline. Concern about physical decline is voiced directly by both Linda Honeyfield and Liz Jones. Recall the references to James's willingness to push Linda around in her wheelchair when she is older or Liz's husband assisting her if she breaks her hip. The wheelchair and the hip problems are stereotypical physical disabilities often associated with older age groups and their inclusion in this article is designed to demonstrate 'true love' in the apparent willingness on the part of the younger (male) partner to look after the older one.

However, the insecurity that accompanies these two women's thoughts and feelings seem to have some underlying substance: recall the first extract we looked at where it was the younger partner who is articulating the problem or issues and she expresses distaste for the ageing body of her older partner.

A challenge to the Myth of Ageing as involving a loss of economic power for the older woman can be seen clearly in the extract by Liz Jones (although it is not so apparent in the other two extracts). This is because it is evident that Liz has a busy (fairly) high profile occupation, similar to the Yummy Grannies in Chapter 5. We have questioned as to why this is the case, whereas that aspect is missing from Linda's narrative. The targeted readership of each magazine could be a factor: the monthly magazines aim to reach a more middle class readership compared to the weekly titles. However, the fact that Linda Honeyfield has been defined by her status as a *mum-of-two* might also be important in order to foreground a mother/son component to her relationship with James. On the other hand, Liz Jones is described as: ...*journalist Liz Jones* which demonstrates her public status as relevant and important in the formation of her relationship (recall she and other women with similar lifestyles are not in the market for 'ordinary' relationships). It is as if the way in which both of these women are defined provides a reason for the basis of their relationships with younger men.

The Myth that Ageing must be resisted is particularly evident in Liz's extract. She spends some time detailing not simply her exercise routine but the clothes that she is wearing, comparing and contrasting these with clothes from her mother's era to reinforce the point that she remains young in outlook, attitude, activities and lifestyle. In the extract about Linda, age

resistance is less overt: there is more of an acceptance of the process and the limitations it provides. However, the title of her extract is: *He makes me feel younger* so we can argue that a strategy of resisting ageing might include falling in love with a much younger man because feeling younger is the overall effect, or that if one is able to attract a younger partner, then one has resisted age successfully. In the problem page letter, the possibility of age resistance is given in the form of references to diet and exercise, although as we noted, the age gap is not referred to specifically in the agony aunt's suggested solution to the problem. It is possible that the man, the older partner in this case, has been only partially successful in whatever age resisting strategies he has adopted. He has been able to attract a much younger partner, but is liable to lose her, possibly because he has not worked hard enough to keep his body in shape and like that of a younger person. This letter and its problem/solution works towards reinforcing the Myth that ageing must be resisted because it warns against the problems that will occur if one does not work hard enough. The warning is not overt, however. It is the implicit message of the problem/solution and its accompanying photograph. The reader is not told directly: she is expected to make the inferences based on her cultural knowledge and the interpretations these consequently enable her to come to.

Reading the articles

The representations we have come across in this Chapter allow the reader to perform her own self evaluation against each of the women that are described. That the latter two articles are being written at all highlights several points. Firstly, these types of relationships are not 'normal', unmarked behaviour and, therefore, they are assumed to be 'interesting' to the readership precisely for that reason. Secondly, the articles also allow the 'new', 'positive' versions of growing older to be exemplified in the form of the two older women who have

successfully managed to attract someone younger. Subscribing to youthful goals and values are a fundamental part of being able to achieve this. This was particularly evident in the case of Liz Jones, who spent a great deal of effort persuading herself and her readership of her credentials which had enabled her to form a successful relationship with someone much younger. The problem page letter, however, which was considered at the outset of this chapter, serves as a warning that sexual relationships may potentially become more difficult as one gets older, because attractiveness 'obviously' declines with age.

The dominant reading of all three of the texts analysed within this Chapter construct an implied or ideal reader as someone who will view a relationship where there is a significant gap in age as controversial, problematic and perhaps empowering. On the one hand, such relationships contain pitfalls, both socially and personally. Societal issues were addressed very explicitly in the article about Linda, predominantly in the form of other people's (negative) reactions to their relationship (recall the resistance that she encountered from family and friends). By contrast, Liz Jones's representation could be seen by readers to be empowering: recall that she is 'successful' in all areas of her life, except, perhaps, that she doesn't have children. Moreover, she seemed to be going through a process of self enquiry and assessment, defining and evaluating herself by contrasting her own behaviour with particular stereotypes (her mother, for example). This appeared to provide her (and the reader) with a sort of justification or validation for the position she had created for herself. The fact that she is able to conduct her own self analysis in itself suggests an independent, active role that was missing from the representation of Linda. And finally, by referring back to the problem page letter we started with, we (readers) can 'see' another potentially negative aspect involved in age gap relationships. If you are the older person, your partner might like you, love you even, but they may find your ageing body distasteful, because ageing is a

decline scenario, often involving a loss of sexual power. You, the older person, may appear to be resisting age in everything you do, but if your partner finds your body distasteful, you have to accept the loss of power that ageing involves.

Chapter 8: Interviews with 'real' magazine readers

'If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?' (Kvale, 1996:1)

In this chapter I detail and analyse some sections from a series of twelve semi-structured interviews, which were all carried out in 2007, with the exception of one, my pilot interview, which occurred somewhat earlier (late 2006). My informants were all women, aged 35+, who were familiar with the magazines under study. The purpose of the interviews was to access the feelings, thoughts and interpretations of my informants to the material in the magazines and, in addition, to see how they positioned themselves in relation both to growing older and in relation to the representations of ageing that they encountered in the magazines. An additional goal was that the thoughts and feelings of 'real magazine readers' could work towards either supporting or discounting my textual analysis. In other words, the interviews would provide a cross-check or triangulation of my textual analysis (Bryman, 2004:275), either lending validity to my analysis, or highlighting alternative versions to some parts of it. Moreover, a reader response component to this study enables me to address an identified weakness of this type of textual analysis which is that studies of this type do not often contain a reader response element (see Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Finally, it allows me to counter some critical observations that have been made about Barthes's (1972) theories that such an analysis and its conclusions is inherently subjective (see, for example, Strinati, 2004:110-114).

The chapter is organised around what I consider to be salient topics that occurred during the interviews about the process of ageing and/or the representations of older age that are being

encountered in the magazines. The topics I discuss have enabled an understanding of how these women's attitudes and feelings about getting older are linked to media representations of ageing. I would like to start, however, by considering the attention my informants claimed to give or not to give to the 'fact' that they are growing older. This is in order to examine whether issues connected to the ageing process are 'important' to them and how much they are affected by them.

A lack of concern with getting older

While it seemed that all of my informants had developed an awareness of the ageing process and had considered its effects, both social and biological, some at first claimed not to. Thus, there were traces of a resistance or distance from the idea that they thought about getting older. For example, in this section of the interview with Avril, 35, which occurred towards the beginning, she claimed not to be at all concerned with growing older:

Extract 1

I: *would you say that getting older's something you think about*

Av: *no I don't particularly*

I: *okay um so there's not any situations where you've thought about oh gosh I'm getting older or*

Av: *no I mean I obviously realise that I am*

I: *mhm*

Av: *but I'm sort of quite comfortable with where I am so you know like I've got a son who's six and um you I've enjoyed myself so I don't sort of have any regrets I just sort of just taken it as it comes really*

I: *okay alright then so you've it's not it's not something you fear or*

Av: *no*

I: *or you know you worry in terms of appearance or anything like that*

Av: *no I just think you've gotta obviously I look at myself and physically I know I'm changing and my face and stuff like that but um I've quite high self esteem so I just sort of work with what I've got really*

I: *yeah okay*

Av: *so I'm not sort of thinking oh you know those are young attractive people or*

I: *okay yeah yeah*

Av: *I'm just sort of going with the flow really*

In this extract, as interviewer and researcher, I am using the knowledge I have gained from reading and studying women's magazines to structure my questions in order to try to access Avril's attitudes and perceptions towards growing older. This is in the hope that she will discuss aspects of the topics I would like to know about. Avril, on the other hand, appears to be distancing herself from the idea that ageing could be something that she thinks about (*no I don't particularly*), or that she fears (*no*). She does not worry about her appearance, she accepts it: *I look at myself and physically I know I'm changing....but I have quite high self-esteem so I just sort of work with what I've got really* and: *I'm just sort of going with the flow really*. It seems, therefore, that although Avril is aware of the biological changes associated with the ageing process, they are not damaging her confidence in any way. She is not anxiously comparing herself with *young attractive people.* At this stage of the interview (the beginning), I was not sure if Avril was distancing herself from the interview process itself, where I as interviewer, was trying to access potentially private thoughts and feelings from someone I had just met ten minutes previously. It is also possible that Avril was resisting (initially, at least) being positioned by me as someone who might give any thought to growing older at all. It seemed, at this point, as if ageing was just not a relevant consideration in her thought process.

Given her initial statements, it appeared unlikely that Avril would be able to recall a situation which had made her aware of the fact that she, too, was getting older. My question, however, produced the following story:

Extract 2

I: *okay that's good so there's not really a situation that occurred to you that you could really think about that made that made you think god I'm getting older*

Av: *I mean yeah I mean I went to er um my partner's um cousin's eighteenth*

I: *yeah*

Av: *and there was hundreds of young women there and I was in the room with all the old aunts [laughs] so I think you know and there I obviously felt like I am definitely you know older and it was so obvious*

I: *okay right because you weren't with the younger group*

Av: *yeah the younger group and you know there was*

I: *how did it get divided up then*

Av: *it was just there was sort of two rooms like this you know and all the sort of family and elderly people were in one room and all the young stylish good looking people were in the other and*

I: *you found yourself*

Av: *I was definitely in the er in the old people's camp [laughs]*

I: *and it made you think*

Av: *yeah I mean I wasn't er um again I wasn't sort of concerned by it I thought it was quite funny really I mean but I recognised that I'm older so it's not sort of er and I don't want to be in the eighteen year old room either I don't want to be in there trying too hard and looking like someone's aunt that walked in and um won't leave either do you know what I mean*

I: *yeah yeah*

Av: *so I was fine but I observed it obviously because it was really apparent in that situation*

I suggest this extract quite clearly demonstrates Avril's awareness of the sociocultural implications of the ageing process, despite her earlier assertions that she does not consider ageing much. Moreover, it also demonstrates Avril's awareness of her own transitional status

in relation to considering herself as either young or old. At her partner's cousin's eighteenth celebration, she finds herself in the room with the *old aunts.* Presumably, Avril does not perceive herself to be an *old aunt* otherwise she would not differentiate herself by labelling the others in the room in that way. On the other hand, she knows it is not appropriate for her to mix with the *young stylish good looking people* either. In a way, she is distancing herself from both groups, both by her actions at the event and in her choice of words in describing those actions to me. She decides that she must physically place herself in the group of *old aunts*, but does not describe herself as an *old aunt*, thus, mentally, she is separate from them. Crucially, she doesn't want to be perceived as an older person who is *trying too hard*. If she mixes with the *young stylish good looking people*, she may be perceived as someone making too much effort to appear younger than they obviously are.

Recall that, according to Barthes (1967:58-59), meaning is created along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. One of the terms that has been chosen (*old aunt*) is pejorative in this context because it describes an older female who is defined simply by her familial status. Moreover, to categorise someone as *old*, as opposed even to say *older*, presents a kind of finality (where there is no possibility of leeway). Consider the terms which might have been chosen instead: 'older women'; 'mature women'; 'grown up women'; 'older relatives' and so on. Furthermore, Avril is making the point that this category of person may be unwelcome amongst groups of young people. *Old aunts* is, of course, a stereotypical classification, describing the status and behaviour of older family members at this type of (sociocultural) event. The phrase: *young stylish good looking people* describes another stereotype. Recall Perkins' (1996:22) point that we measure ourselves against the stereotypes that are drawn out and this is, I suggest, what Avril is attempting to do in her descriptions to me. She is aware that she does not belong comfortably in either group. Recall also that stereotypes can be

either favourable or unfavourable descriptions (Allport, 1979:191). Thus, on the one hand, there is the favourable description of *young stylish good looking people* and on the other, the somewhat less favourable description of being older (*old aunts, someone's aunt*). And to say that you are *someone's aunt*, suggests you belong to someone rather than being a person in your own right, especially if you are *someone's aunt who walked in and won't leave*! Avril is also positioning herself because she says *I recognised that I'm older* whereas she could have chosen the term *younger* instead of older. She is positioning herself in relation to the *young stylish good looking people*, and while she is acknowledging that she is no longer part of that group, she is still classifying herself in relation to that group, rather than in relation to the older group of *old aunts*.

Interpreting the phrase *trying too hard* relies on the shared understanding (in this case, the cultural knowledge that both Avril and I share) which is that a woman may be negatively evaluated for attempting to look and act in ways younger than she really is. It is not the same as looking *good for one's age*, which is a positive evaluation. *Trying too hard* involves a perceived lack of acceptance of the inevitable (that one is growing older) on the part of the one who is trying: that one no longer belongs with the *young stylish good looking people*. Moreover, Avril is also demonstrating that spending time in the young room will in fact make her appear to be even older than she is, because of the contrast between herself and those younger and because of her awareness that younger people do not like to mix with *old aunts.* Furthermore, Avril doesn't want to be *looking like someone's aunt that walked in and ...won't leave*. She would be perceived as older than she really is, and very much out of place, as if she were someone's older relative who was not wanted as they were not part of the group.

Avril claims that the experience hasn't bothered her (*I wasn't sort of concerned by it* and *so I was fine*); on the other hand, the situation provoked an awareness of her age: *I recognised that I'm older* and *I observed it because it was really apparent in that situation.* Avril is also displaying a confidence in herself as a woman approaching the midlife that is often promoted in the magazines (recall particularly the Yummy Granny, Edina Ronay, who was confident about becoming a grandmother or Jane Fonda who promoted the idea that as older women, we can become far more radical). Additionally, by using verbs like *recognised* and *observed*, Avril is indicating her awareness of her social and cultural place. She is also demonstrating her distance from what we are discussing, because those verbs imply a kind of 'objective view'. Age and ageing is *apparent* to Avril, but she claims it is not central to who she is as a woman.

Pretty for an old lady?

A sense of distance in relation to growing older is also illustrated in the extract I consider next. Here, I recount another story that was elicited in answer to the question where I asked informants if they could recall an incident that had made them aware that they were getting older. Sandra, 42 relayed the following:

Extract 3

I: *um so can you think so a situation that occurred that made you think about getting older well you've just said that about going to the school gates seeing and seeing the mums when they're um*

Sa: *yeah*

I: *well what about the thing that you said to me*

Sa: *oh yes [laughs]*

I: *do you mind telling me again what happened?*

Sa: *[laughs] as I was as I was walking back from dropping Lizzie off at the YMCA and as I went past two um probably under the age of 20 boys one of them said "aren't you pretty for an old lady?"*

I: *[laughs] oh god. How did that make you feel?*

Sa: *well in my head I wanted to go well actually I'm not that old but then I thought about it actually compared to them I was pretty old I could have been their mother [laughs]*

This is similar in some respects to Avril's story. To use Avril's terms, there is a recognition or realisation of age as a relative factor by these two women in terms of the interaction with other, much younger people. In this extract, Sandra describes walking past two young men who clearly find her attractive, but with conditions: she is attractive (or pretty) despite the fact that she is an *old lady*. As we have noted in Chapter 5 which was about grandmother identities, Allport (1979:191) refers to a stereotype as 'an exaggerated belief associated with a category'. Here, age is being exaggerated, in that, clearly Sandra is older than other women to whom these young men might normally be attracted. Nevertheless, they consider her to be *pretty*. This must then be countered by referring to her as an *old lady* and, moreover, that she is pretty despite being an *old lady*. In my turn, I show my attitude towards this story (*oh god*) and go on to ask her how she felt about this, the implication being, of course, that to be described as an *old lady* might not make one feel good, given the taken for granted negative cultural associations which older age carries. Once again, we can draw on Barthes's (1967:58) description of how we access meaning not simply by the signs that have been chosen but also by what has been left out. There are certain (negative) connotations associated with the term *old lady*, which other terms that could have been chosen, such as 'older woman', 'mature woman', 'grown up', do not carry.

Furthermore, Sandra and I are evidently both focussing on the age part of the description, rather than the prettiness aspect. Sandra knows that this is the relevant point as her final turn

in this extract shows. She wanted to tell the boys that she wasn't *that old*. She knows she is reaching that point termed 'the midlife' (she is forty two): she is old but not *that old* which means she is not old enough to be considered an *old lady* and to know that we have to have a mental construction in our minds about the exaggerated beliefs associated with the category of *old lady*. Sandra does not fit this image, but she concedes that she herself is in the generation between the young men and an old lady because she suggests that she could have been their mother. Relatively speaking, then, she is old, at least as far as they are concerned. They are unlikely to be seriously interested in her, nor she in them: mother/son relationships are inappropriate sexually. Recall in Chapter 7 where we discussed age gap relationships, Linda Honeyfield's friends comments when she started dating James, a much younger man, joking as to whether she was going to take him to school with his lunchbox. It was her friends' way of questioning the motivations behind their relationship.

There are other similarities in Sandra's story and that of Avril's. Both women are distancing themselves from age, or more precisely the process of ageing, although in slightly different ways. Avril distances herself by conveying that she isn't bothered by it and by using terms which reflect age as an observation rather as something intrinsic to her, while Sandra's distancing strategies include the comment that she isn't that old (not old enough to be considered an old lady at any rate), but nevertheless there is a concession or acceptance in her self evaluation: she is old enough to be a mother, but not old enough to be considered past being a mother; she has not been tipped into the next category, at least in her own eyes, the one of being an *old lady*. I argue that both Sandra and Avril are resisting being positioned as old people, but more than that: they are resisting being positioned as women for whom ageing is a worry or a concern. I would also suggest that this type of resistance draws upon the Myth that Ageing must be resisted, because it is a type of age resistant strategy in itself. It is as if

older age is not relevant to that person so they distance themselves from it and claim not to be bothered by it.

It is the connotations and negative cultural associations attached to such labels such as *old lady* which perhaps provide women themselves with a sense of resistance with which to fight ageing. To be considered an *old lady* involves a reduced status, both in economic and sexual terms; a downgrading from a previous independence and activity to a more passive role. Thus the noun phrase *old lady* draws directly on the Myth of Ageing involving a loss of power. Phrases such as this are never used in magazines to describe the readership. Women are evaluated using terms to which more positive attributes are attached. *Grown up* for example, which appears regularly and is discussed elsewhere, describes someone responsible, reliable and independent, while *old lady* draws us immediately to similar imagery to that of the stereotypical granny in a rocking chair, which readers were invited to keep in mind while reading *The rise of the yummy granny* (see Chapter 5). One could argue that just such an image is being invoked by the young man who Sandra encountered, an image which can be reliably reproduced by all of us: Sandra understood its negative message and so did I as can be seen in my reaction to her story. The extracts from the interviews with Avril and Sandra that I have discussed describe a certain way some women position themselves in relation to the negativity associated with cultural ageing, but there are other ways. For example, women position themselves differently from one another in relation to the age resistant messages they encounter in media representations.

Embracing and resisting age resistant messages

Women's magazines work hard to provide us with age resistant messages. Articles appear regularly, particularly in the monthly titles, of successful career stories, or personal stories, such as having a baby later in life, or those that consider cosmetic surgery as an option. Some of my questions were aimed at finding out how these articles were perceived by readers themselves. I would like to consider some of those extracts next, starting with the thoughts of Sian, 44:

Extract 4

I: *yes sort of articles about women who've kind of doing things for the first time as they've got older and so oh*

Sian: *um um yeah. So it's about I suppose a lot of it is about sort of feeling empowered isn't it when you when you get older of having of having the confidence but maybe you have to live that life to that age to be able to have that confidence to know what you want or to know what you don't want*

For Sian, it seems these articles provide and reinforce a positive image of getting older. She suggests that for her the message of the articles is about *feeling empowered* although she looks to me for reassurance that my understanding of the articles is the same as her's (*isn't it*) and they are also about *confidence*. This is an attribute associated with older women in many articles. It was overtly evident in the Chapter where I discussed Celebrities, but it was also evident in the chapter describing the Yummy Grannies who seemed sure of their position and standing in the world, and importantly how to conduct themselves as older women. It was also evident in part of the chapter about age gap relationships: Liz Jones is certainly confident in the sense of her status and standing, although perhaps less so in terms of certain aspects of her relationship. The type of confidence that Sian is drawing attention to is one that, apparently, only comes with increased age and manifests itself in an ability *to know what you want or to know what you don't want*.

However, the distancing strategy shown by Avril and Sandra is also at work, although perhaps to a lesser degree. It is evidenced here in the way Sian chooses to describe getting older and consequently having more confidence as something she suspects happens but is not completely sure of (*sort of feeling empowered isn't it when you when you get older* and *maybe you have to live that life to that age to be able to have that confidence*). There is the tag question referred to earlier (*isn't it*) which seems to seek confirmation from me that what she is saying is right, and that she is reading the messages in the 'right' way. Moreover, there is the possibility that the tag question is indicative of the potentially sensitive topics that we are discussing. In addition, there is the possibility expressed by the modal *maybe* that confidence is age related. Sian doesn't know for sure because she has not reached that age stage yet, or at least is indicating to me that she hasn't, and it is possible that her choice of language reflects her perceived distance from the women that might be described in the articles she is referring to. The distancing strategy is, however, very dependent upon the Myths of Ageing: certainly that ageing is a process of decline and that it involves a loss of power. By distancing themselves (which I have noted represents a type of age resistant practice) these women demonstrate an awareness of all of the Myths and way in which those Myths structure their actions and their thinking. On the other hand, another informant, Adina, 40, was quite critical of the messages she perceived these types of articles promoted:

Extract 5

I: *.... and what about thinking about the women's magazines um do you would you say I dunno how familiar you are with their content would you say they present positive images of ageing what would you say what would you say the messages in generally*

Ad: *not in magazines I wouldn't say it was particularly positive I mean in these type of magazines*

I: *can you say something about what you mean have a look at them*

Ad: *yeah yeah no I think in these magazines*

[.....]

Ad: *I think part of the reason I stopped actually as well as the cost but part of the reason I did I think stop buying them looking back at it now I do think you feel slightly they're full of sort of success stories aren't they all the time of well she's fifty but you know she looks fabulous she's sixty she looks fabulous*

I: *mhm*

Ad: *and I think that can almost depending on where you are yourself that can almost make you feel a bit oh well I haven't you know just opened me own business at sixty two and you know that sort of thing*

It isn't always the case, then, that the magazines succeed in convincing readers that there are many more possibilities open to older women or that this can be a very positive time of life. In fact, they can have the opposite effect and make women feel inadequate if they do not look fabulous as older women or if they have not achieved great things. Although Adina does not actually get around to explicitly stating how she feels when she encounters these types of articles, her implication is quite clear. She does say the messages these articles give out aren't very positive, and she implies that they can make you (Adina in fact uses *you* to include all women readers as a group) think you have failed, if as an older woman you are not judged as looking fabulous or perhaps have not started your own business empire. The seemingly greater choice (or available options) of how and what to be as an older woman can create feelings of anxiety or inferiority. A similar type of attitude is reiterated in the following extract from my interview with Jane, 40:

Extract 6

I: *right so do you think women's magazines present positive images of ageing I mean have you come have you noticed some of the articles in there it's like um I had a baby at forty five you can turn your life have you noticed those kinds of articles*

J: *oh yeah yeah*

I: *you can be you can suddenly be successful at sixty do you do you regard those as positive messages what do you think*

J: *I suppose they are positive I think the only problem is that it can have the negative effect of making the rest of us feel a bit like failures that's the problem isn't it. So you know and it is it is sort of nice to read things I think it's nice if you're the type of person that can accept that um as you say the chances are the picture's been touched up you know not everybody looks like that you know it takes a lot of money and a lot of big team to make you look glamorous and you know you shouldn't I think you gotta be comfortable in your own skin haven't you and if you don't feel like you're okay as you are then sometimes reading stories about you know*

I: *mhm*

J: *these glamorous successful sixty year old women*

I: *do you read do you read those*

J: *I would read them yeah I would read them definitely particularly the ones about people having babies*

I: *yes yes*

J: *because I read that and I think um oh god how are they going to cope you know and and*

I: *what in your forties and that*

J: *yeah*

Unlike Adina, Jane appears to enjoy reading these articles, although she has a mixed reaction as to how realistic she considers them to be. For example, although *it is sort of nice to read things* for Jane, it is about the down to earth realities that one must keep in mind when reading articles depicting successful older lives. These articles can be problematic *making the rest of us feel a bit like failures.* Jane's words, like Adina's, group *us* together and set *us* apart from the successful women in the articles as the minority: this is not what happens to most of us. The articles can also have the unwanted effect of inducing more insecurity and less confidence, if you do not keep in mind that the magazine will have exaggerated qualities (*chances are the picture's been touched up you know not everybody looks like that).*
However, of interest to Jane are the articles which describe older motherhood. She claims that she wants to speculate about the reality of having a baby at forty or over (the age she has

just reached now). This suggests that how positive or enjoyable these articles are to read will depend very much on a woman's own life story up to this point in time, and perhaps, importantly, what her hopes and aspirations are for the future. If the articles describe something that you might want to consider doing, but are perhaps worried about, such as having a baby later on in life, reading about someone else who has done this may be inspiring (or off-putting: *I think um oh god how are they going to cope you know*). On the other hand, if you felt you had not achieved (or did not want to achieve) the same goals and aspirations that are described in these articles, anxiety and a lack of confidence may be the result.

The pressurising aspect of these type of articles was a recurrent theme as is evidenced in the words of Alison, 40:

Extract 7

I: *do you think women's magazines present positive images of ageing*

A: *I think occasionally*

I: *what about those articles we were talking about do you think they're positive*

A: *well I suppose they are positive in way because they almost they do but then you feel pressured because you think oh I'm not doing that oh shit there's things I wanted to do and I haven't done them and they're doing it. So in way when you're reading those things even though they're positive it can make you feel quite pressured*

I: *that's right that's right and then uh there's quite a few articles all the skincare advertisements, cosmetic surgery*

A: *I just think it's an absolute the amount of money that some people can spend*

I: *those skin creams*

A: *I cannot believe*

There seems to be some doubt, then, as to the effect of the articles which detail the lifestyle and activities of successful, older women. There is a question mark over whether such

articles make women aware of the possibilities that are open to them, even when they are older (and so give positive messages) or whether they can contribute towards making women feel less good about themselves, because they are not as successful as the role models which are depicted (a somewhat more negative message). It is possible that the views these women are articulating form part of a resistant discourse. This is not an age resistant discourse, it is more a type of resistance to the new 'positive' images that have become associated with older age groups in recent decades, some of which we have been discussing within this thesis. It is about questioning whether these images are indeed 'positive'.

Well known and frequently talked about 'age resistant' strategies such as cosmetic surgery come in for a similar kind of scepticism as can be seen in (once again) the words of Jane:

Extract 8

J: *I like reading them I'm interested but I do try and take them with a bit of a pinch of salt cos I try to be kind of you know let's be realistic*

I: *can you talk more about that in terms of like I don't know*

J: *well like for example I'm glad you said that about cosmetic surgery*

I: *yes*

J: *because I find that absolutely unbelievable you know and I actually think it's quite sad when women you know it's so kind of body conscious that they think they have to spend thousands of pounds on surgery you know to change their bodies you know ageing is just nature isn't it that's just life and you know I know some people are luckier than others some people have good skin and you think oh they look great or they look you know but really oh I think that's really sad I could never you might come back in ten years and I'll say guess what I'm having a you know I'm having a face lift I couldn't imagine that*

I: *and you wouldn't have like Botox would you ever consider it*

J: *I could never imagine it I find that almost laughable you know when I look at people and I think why would you do that*

Here, Jane admits to enjoying reading articles in women's magazines, but she reminds herself that they are not to be taken seriously (*but I do try and take them with a bit of a pinch of salt*

cos I try to be kind of you know let's be realistic). For Jane, they are not about real life, and in fact she expresses her attitudes towards the concept of cosmetic surgery with a mixture of incredulity and sadness: *I find that absolutely unbelievable you know and I actually think it's quite sad.* This seems to be because, for Jane, deciding to have cosmetic surgery displays a lack of acceptance of the natural aspect of the ageing process, although she acknowledges that the ageing process may affect some people more than others. Even an apparently less invasive procedure such as Botox is dismissed by Jane as *almost laughable.* Jane is showing her resistance to several things. First, she shows resistance to the central concern of cosmetic surgery, which is its claim to make one look younger and better. Second, Jane is resistant to the lack of acceptance of the ageing process that the magazines ultimately promote by carrying these types of articles. What is more, Jane is also challenging and resisting the idea that it is 'obvious' that one would be prepared or even consider going to such lengths to remain young looking. And finally, she is showing her distance from the type of person who would succumb to such pressure: *I could never imagine it I find that almost laughable you know when I look at people and I think why would you do that.* Adina, Alison and Jane are all making the point that these are not stories or ways of being applicable to all women, or even to many women. Indeed, they themselves are resisting the idea that it is 'normal' and 'obvious' that one should become interested in age resistant practices such as cosmetic surgery and, moreover, they are resisting the message that in order to 'do' older age successfully, one has to do something exceptional, for example, start a business or have a baby later in life.

To an extent, then, Adina, Jane and Alison are resisting the dominant reading position that is being offered to them in some of the magazine texts. They are highlighting the point that not all women are embracing the new positivity that has been associated with growing older

today (see Gott, 2005). They do not seem convinced that they are always being presented with 'better' possibilities than those available to women previously. They are challenging being positioned as the type of women who will want to strive to achieve greater success financially or in terms of looks, or even that it is a positive attitude to have. They are not, then, allowing themselves to be positioned as one, homogenous group by virtue of the fact that they are women (see Ballaster et al, 1996:88). Instead, these three women are rejecting being made to feel part of such a group in relation to the ideals set out in these magazines. They are certainly signalling that they are rejecting conventional strategies of age resistance and, because this seems clear, I would suggest that they are rejecting what conventional notions of ageing as decline (the first Myth) and as involving a loss of power (the second Myth) involve. For example, that because you (apparently) lose your looks as you get older, so you should try to minimise the impact of this (perhaps by having Botox) or that you should aim to do something out of ordinary, like start a business to retain some status. I think these women do consider that ageing can mean a loss of power if, for example, you subscribe to age resistance strategies such as Botox or cosmetic surgery. Recall, for example, Jane's comments that she found it: *almost laughable you know when I look at people and I think why would you do that.* It is not always the case, however, that women are completely tied into a particular position of a wholesale acceptance or rejection of the dominant reading position; in fact they can express seemingly conflicting views within the same conversation. It is this apparent contradiction that I consider next.

Pushing the boundaries

Women continue to read and enjoy articles promoting ways of being older or indeed ways of being a certain age, a point which Jane made and as the following extract from Catherine, 67, also shows. Nevertheless, sometimes contradictions arise in the way we describe our

thoughts and feelings, demonstrating that we are not always united within ourselves.

Catherine has read *Woman's Own* for many years and she spent some time discussing the fashion pages. Fashionable clothing is another favourite genre in most women's magazines, with many articles modelling clothing suitable for different age groups:

Extract 9

C: *um er I quite I was quite interested I mean I'm not fashionable but I am conscious of not loo looking like mutton dressed as lamb*

I: *ohh*

C: *I'm don't want to look fuddy duddy*

I: *so what do you do you understand by it's one of the things I was going to ask you a little bit later but I might as well ask you now as we've got we've got on to it. Wha what d'you understand and what does that mean to you that phrase mutton dressed as lamb*

C: *um well it means an older woman dressed in younger clothes and it being apparent that um she's trying to do just that*

I: *oh okay and so*

C: *but um er I feel quite rebellious about*

I: *right right*

C: *the whole the whole thing because I really feel a woman should wear what she feels is right*

I: *right okay so it's*

C: *I couldn't care tuppence about what other people think but I actually do otherwise I wouldn't look as to what is fashionable*

I: *right okay so it's getting that balance between sort of looking like mutton dressed as lamb whatever that is but not sort of um appearing really fuddy duddy and sort of um obviously older*

C: *that's right*

I: *yeah*

C: *older than your years I mean one's as bad as the other*

I: *yes yes yeah*

In this extract, Catherine relays the general understanding of the cultural phrase *mutton dressed as lamb,* that it describes an older woman dressed in clothes 'obviously' designed for younger women. In other words, it describes an older woman who dresses 'inappropriately' for her age. It is a metaphor which relies on the understanding that lamb tastes better than mutton because mutton is older and tougher (Fairhurst, 1998:260). Catherine, however, counters her understanding of the phrase by expressing feeling *rebellious....because I really feel a woman should wear what she feels is right* and so it appears she is arguing that women should be able to wear whatever they want to. However, she goes on to claim, that she is not bothered by the thoughts of others *(I couldn't care tuppence about what other people think)* which I take to mean she is not concerned with sociocultural norms concerning age appropriate behaviour. She realises, straightaway, however, that this is not actually true (*but I actually do*) as she spends time reading articles and assessing what is *fashionable* which could mean what is fashionable generally or perhaps more specifically what is fashionable (and appropriate) for one's age group. Catherine is acknowledging, therefore, that there is a contradictory aspect to her thinking: on the one hand, her conscious stance is that she doesn't care what others think, but on the other hand, she does care, and this is indicated by her reading behaviour. We can suggest that these contradictory feelings and the consequent behaviour are probably applicable to many women: we can be critical of so-called societal attitudes, dictating appropriate dress or behaviour (and those attitudes and behaviour may be reinforced in women's magazines), but nevertheless, we are affected by the messages they convey.

In my next turn I give my interpretation of her words: that for an older woman an equilibrium needs to be attained between not dressing in a style that is obviously 'too young' for her chronological years, but also not in a way that is "too old" either (*not sort of um appearing*

really fuddy duddy and sort of um obviously older). In fact, Catherine goes on to say: *one's as bad as the other*. In a way, then, there also seems to be a contradictory element operating, in that Catherine does not like the idea of censure in what to wear, but nevertheless acknowledges a *bad* side to dressing 'too young' and, conversely, to dressing 'too old', thus she is being constrained herself. This is because even though she would like not to care what others think, she accepts that she does. So *one's as bad as the other* could equally well apply either to ways of dressing or indeed to ways of thinking, in terms of challenge or acceptance. A woman such as Catherine does not want to appear to be *fuddy duddy* which essentially means she does not want to be classified as outdated and old fashioned, in other words, labelled by looks and attire as old. It is possible that Catherine has an image of a stereotypical older person in mind against which to measure herself. If a woman is classified as outdated and old fashioned, it means she 'proves' the Myth that ageing involves decline (because one no longer keeps up to date by wearing stylish clothes) and so of course, another Myth, that ageing must be resisted, comes into play, and consequently a woman, such as Catherine, must find out what is fashionable (for her age) by looking in the magazines.

Especially common in women's magazines are articles modelling appropriate and fashionable clothing for different age decades. Clothes have always been a marker of youth or conversely age, and dressing in a style too young for one's years is judged according to the severity of the offense. If the gap between what is worn and who is wearing it is a large one, the person is considered socially inept: it is worse than lying about one's age because, as Lurie puts it, 'clothes never shut up' (Lurie, 1992:56). Some way further into the interview, Catherine is describing an older doctor at her workplace who wore miniskirts. This appears to provide a challenge to the idea of social ridicule a woman might encounter on wearing age inappropriate clothing:

Extract 10

I: *right okay right okay so um what about things like um women who wear mini skirts after about forty well we sort of talked about that cos you said that people should be able to wear what they wanted*

C: *oh I think forty's young I mean one of the doctors who's just retired a year older than me very dainty petite she always used to wear skirts above the knee*

I: *really*

C: *and she looked very dignified*

In this extract, Catherine is building upon some of her earlier points, first by challenging the idea that *forty* is the cultural milestone that marks the end of being young (*forty's young*). To back this point up, and the point she made about a woman wearing *whatever she feels is right*, she provides the example of the doctor at work, who is described as *very dainty petite* and *very dignified*. Note, the doctor is being described in a way that is appropriate in Western cultures for someone of her age, particularly in looking *very dignified*. Such a description is unlikely to be applied to a younger woman wearing miniskirts, who might conceivably be described as looking "attractive" or even "sexy". *Dainty and petite* are devoid of sexual connotations, but nevertheless are very feminine terms. Moreover, by describing the doctor as *looking very dignified* there is an implication that she does not look ridiculous despite wearing clothes commonly associated with younger age groups. It also brings us back to the idea that the doctor was not looking like *mutton dressed as lamb.* To use another cultural phrase, we can suggest the doctor is *growing old gracefully*, which implies a process which involves a change in attitude and action, and a level of acceptance, as one grows older (Fairhurst, 1998:261). The doctor is somehow or other maintaining her professional persona, while wearing clothes often associated with much younger women.

In using the term *dignified*, there is the suggestion that she does not look out of place either for her age (sixties) or status (doctor). In fact, the doctor appears to have got the *balance* that I refer to in my interpretation of Catherine's words (in Extract 9) just right. In a way, then, the doctor that Catherine is referring to operates as a type of metaphor, or vehicle, which allows Catherine to get her point across: it is acceptable for women, no matter what their age, to wear whatever they want to, although they should avoid trying to look much younger than their years.

We might ask ourselves how Catherine is positioning herself in relation to the representations she comes across in the magazines. She is conveying to me that she allows herself to be guided by articles such as those which describe what is fashionable for different age groups, so that she doesn't look *fuddy duddy*. To that extent, then, she is taking up the reading position that is being offered to her: someone who might be in need of a bit of instruction on how to make the most of one's looks, whatever one's age. She is also subscribing to cultural norms and values for a woman, those of paying great attention to appearance and fashion. However, what she is resisting at the same time is the idea that there is an arbiter or group who can prescribe appropriate, age related behaviour including that of dress, which includes telling women what they may not wear after a certain age. So perhaps, for Catherine, it is alright being told what fashions you can wear (the *latest jeans*), but perhaps not those that you cannot (*miniskirts after forty*). The contradictions demonstrate that we can be critical of some of the ways in which we are positioned by the texts we are reading, but that does not mean we reject the dominant reading completely. We can accept some of the ideals and values that are being promoted, but challenge others. This describes a negotiated reading position or what Hall (1992:137), in relation to television viewing, calls 'Decoding within the negotiated version'.

The problem is that no matter what resistance Catherine is displaying towards cultural norms and ideals, she is still accepting that youthful ideas in relation to dress and other codes of behaviour are to be valued. It's just that there is a limit beyond which the older woman should not go. On the other hand, however, the doctor managed it, very successfully, at least, according to Catherine. But there still remain some fashions that define someone as young or as older. If that were not the case, I would not have been asking for thoughts or reactions to the idea of wearing miniskirts after forty (recall it was a phenomenon Mariella Frostrup also referred to as something she didn't think a woman could do after forty). Get your clothing behaviour wrong, as Lurie (1992) reminds us, and you will be ridiculed.

The transitional status of older women

While we could argue that Catherine (using the doctor as her example) is providing a challenge to the idea that only certain clothes are appropriate at any given time of a woman's life, this allows us also to question the point (or indeed the age) at which one considers oneself or is considered to have crossed the boundary into the camp of the 'older woman'. At what point does a woman, a woman like Avril, for example, recognise or understand that she is no longer young? We saw in the chapter on modern grandmother identities, that what it is to be a grandmother appears to be changing and now involves remaining part of mainstream life and taking part in activities more commonly associated with younger age groups. But the idea of transition or flux is evident, because there is a still a recognisable image of a less active person removed from many social activities with which to compare the new model. The following extract comes from the interview with Sian, 44, who describes the generational shift that seems to be occurring:

Extract 11

Sian: *when I was a child you know somebody in their forties was you know old. Now I would say somebody in the sixties you know my job share partner has just retired she's 65*

I: *yeah yeah*

Sian: *I don't think of her when we go out to lunch I don't think oh I'm with somebody who's 65.*

I: *yeah*

Sian: *but that doesn't mean to say that she's er she sort of comes to our level sort of thing if you like. She is who she is. She's got some much um*

I: *yes yes*

Sian: *she's you know she's got that sort of inner confidence*

I: *mm hum*

Sian: *and you know she's just a person who makes you want to be around. She's had a really interesting life um she dresses stylishly for her and she always looks really smart. She's really fit she's fitter than me she goes to the gym like every day runs for miles um yeah really really fit and certainly doesn't look what your idea I suppose what I said earlier in my head I don't feel old but my image when I was younger of somebody that was 65 was of sort of a wrinkled old granny with a walking stick and that just isn't just isn't the case anymore is it*

I: *so you think um it's different being older today*

Sian: *I think definitely*

In this extract, Sian makes the claim that, as a child, she would have regarded forty as old, but that her thinking and perception has changed as she herself has grown older. What we need to disentangle is whether the shift in thinking is something that would have occurred in any case, as Sian grew older, or whether it can be explained by the idea that the definition of what it means to be an older person is indeed changing, at least culturally. Sian claims not to think of her older colleague as someone old: *when we go out to lunch I don't think oh I'm with somebody who's 65.* Here, she is making the point that she socialises with her older colleague (*lunch*) and that age is not a consideration in their interaction. But more than that: Sian

doesn't think she is spending time with someone who possesses the stereotypical attributes commonly associated with a 65 year old woman. Sian further makes the point that this is not because the older colleague starts behaving as if she herself is younger (*But that doesn't mean to say that she's er she sort of comes to our level*). She does not behave inappropriately for her age by acting in a way that is younger than her years. On the contrary, it is because the older colleague is very confident about who she is (*she's got that sort of inner confidence*). Confidence, as we have seen, is currently a description often associated with women who are older and was evident in the articles discussed in the chapter on Celebrities, particularly in the words of Jane Fonda and Andie MacDowell. This extract (and indeed the one we have just been discussing relating to Catherine's doctor who wore miniskirts) also supports Meyrowitz's (1985:249) reference to a 'uni age style behavioural style' which describes the merging of dress, lifestyle and activities across the generations, with no sharp demarcation as may once have been apparent (see also Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991).

Sian's older colleague seems to typify the new 'confident' construction of older age. She is someone you want to be around: she has had an interesting life, she dresses stylishly and she is very fit, running regularly and going to the gym. Sian describes the image in her head that she had of older women of 65 when she was younger: *a wrinkled old granny with a walking stick* and so it is evident that, for her, that image no longer applies (*that just isn't just isn't the case anymore*). These types of statements reiterate and reinforce what became apparent in Chapter 5: that what it is to be an older woman may indeed be changing, but a sense of fixity or permanence has not quite been reached. Hence, we need an 'old' stereotype to refer to (recall the *sweet old lady in the rocking chair* described in the article in Chapter 5, which matches well with Sian's image of a *wrinkled granny*, her defining characteristics exaggerated). By conjuring up the stereotype, we can convince ourselves of the possibilities

we now have as older women compared to those the previous generation of women had available to them. The 'old' stereotype also provides us with a representation we can measure our own behaviour against (Perkins, 1996:22).

Times have changed and our images and stereotypes are being remoulded to fit an ageing population which needs to be seen as productive and useful, not least because they are necessary for the workforce, but partly also to reduce the dependency scenario that is often associated with older age groups. This is in keeping with discourses of healthy lifestyles, with the emphasis on keeping fit and active, which, as we have discussed before are promoted for all age groups as good and necessary.

Rather than seeing ageing and growing older in terms of decline, then, it can be viewed as an extension of useful adulthood, but it is described in somewhat different terms from those associated with youth. Older women may be described as *dainty* and *dignified* even *stylish*, but they seem less likely to be described in terms of sexual attractiveness. Moreover, we have to keep images of our old stereotypes in mind for two reasons. First, this reminds us that we are more fortunate in that, today, there are more possibilities available to us of what we can be when we are older now than there used to be and, secondly, they work at solidifying the basic Myth of decline that is associated with old age. It is still present, but the new image encapsulated in the new ways of doing old age, reinforces another myth: that ageing can (and must at all costs) be resisted. To resist age can have very positive benefits, because we can minimise the effects of the decline. We can continue to be valued members of society. We can continue to be useful (as grandmothers), to work in high status

occupations (in addition to celebrities, recall the Yummy Grannies) but, perhaps even more importantly, we can continue to be people that others (who are younger) want to be around.

As older women, we can continue to be active members of society, rather than removed socially from meaningful interaction with others. However, Sian needs to make that point to me and this is on the understanding (the cultural knowledge that we both share) that this might not be a widespread belief: the stereotypical older person might not be interesting or someone you want to continue to be around socially. Recall Avril's comments when she said she didn't consider herself part of the young, stylish people at a social gathering: this perception is based on similar cultural knowledge, that she might not be valued because she is older and might not be someone who the young people wanted to be around for any length of time. I turn now to consider another extract which highlights the possibility or the perception that a person, or their contribution may be thought of as less valid because they are older.

Slipping away

An informant, Karen, 45, discussed a situation that occurred at work (she is a nurse who works in an outpatient dermatology clinic), when both the topic under discussion between the other people present, plus her own age and status in relation to them (a female doctor and a male consultant) made her aware of growing older and the negative implications it can have: perhaps younger people do not want to include you in their discussions. At this point in the interview, Karen had just said *I mean who wants to sort of get old and look really old* and I had asked why this was the case:

Extract 12

K: *something's slipping away maybe*

I: *um*

K: *maybe you think you become invisible*

I: *that's talked about a lot invisibility*

K: *like I did with that doctor*

I: *what did you say?*

K: *the consultant*

I: *yeah and you were sitting there*

K: *the registrar the doc the young doctor they're all younger than me. I'm a year older than the consultant*

I: *um you're a year older than the consultant okay right yeah*

K: *yeah but he is talking to her younger and they're talking about the botox they're talking about fillers*

I: *and you were invisible?*

K: *I think they're talking to each other and I'm sort of not included I'm just sitting there listening and perhaps nodding my head but they're having a very intense conversation so it's not butting in a bit but I sort of also feel whether they're thinking oh whether this is something you're interested in or [inaudible] perhaps they think it's too late for you [laughs]*

To begin with, Karen is expressing an 'obvious' truth: nobody wants to get old and, crucially, look old. Being older is not an attribute that is culturally valuable in Western societies. It is very difficult to challenge that view because, as Gullette has reminded us, whatever argument one uses in an attempt to challenge the negativity and decline scenario associated with ageing, there is always the 'death card' (2004:107). Perhaps this is what Karen is referring to when she says: *something's slipping away maybe.* The sense of invisibility she refers to in her next turn expresses the sense of dwindling importance that can accompany becoming

older and can manifest itself in a variety of ways. For example, in the chapter where we considered Celebrities, MacDowell discussed the 'truth' that there is not as much work for older actors and in the chapter on Yummy Grannies, the grandmothers, particularly Eve and Joan, knew when it was appropriate to remain silent and not express their views. Essentially, becoming invisible involves a less important status, where one's contribution is not as valuable and is often ignored. Indeed, Woodward (1999:ix) discusses how older women become invisible in everyday life, sometimes with devastating consequences. The social consequences are illustrated quite clearly in Karen's extract, because she felt it was not appropriate for her to take part in any meaningful way in the conversation.

The asymmetrical nature of the situation is overtly apparent, in the sense that the main conversation was taking place between a consultant and a doctor, whereas she is a nurse. But perhaps the asymmetry also extends to the fact that Karen is older than either of the other two participants. She certainly perceives that to be the case. The topic of their discussions seemed to make both of these factors apparent for Karen, perhaps causing her some discomfort on a number of levels. She felt she was *invisible*, because she was older, because she was a nurse and because there was the possible implication that she might not be interested in the topic (Botox and fillers) or that, at her age, she was unlikely to consider such procedures (*perhaps they think it's too late for you).* Nevertheless, she felt obliged to make a minimal contribution to the conversation, by her paralinguistic behaviour (*I'm just sitting there listening and perhaps nodding my head*). Invisibility, therefore, is a complicated phenomenon. One is required to be there in case of need, but one is not required, in fact, one is discouraged, from performing or having a central role in many aspects of everyday life. It is about knowing your place. And if you are ignored, because you are older, that is something you have to accept. The Myth that Ageing involves a loss of power appears to be

at work here for Karen, although we have to keep in mind her institutional position in relation to her interlocutors.

Moreover, Karen is drawing heavily on the Myth that Ageing is a decline scenario because she is wondering whether the doctor and consultant are not including her in the conversation because she is too old and it is too late even to consider procedures such as Botox. Karen's interpretation of events suggests that it is a 'good thing' to resist ageing. After all, consider the position Karen is now in with two highly qualified individuals (doctors) discussing and implementing quite drastic age resistant strategies. The fact that they are doctors lends credibility to the procedures they are talking about, possibly allowing someone like Karen to feel invisible and inferior both because she is a nurse and because she is a bit older than them.

Visible signs of ageing: grey hair

The fear of becoming invisible is probably, and paradoxically one of the reasons why we work so hard to conceal the visible signs of ageing. For example, many women (and some men) dye their hair once it becomes grey. We know this is the case because women's magazines are full of advertisements advertising hair colorants and, indeed, Andie MacDowell herself has been advertising L'Oreal products, including hair dyes, for a number of years. The women who are featured in titles aimed at the 35+ age group are not photographed with grey hair. Another of my informants, Petra, had the following stories to tell:

Extract 13

P: *and it um interestingly I think when I was younger well I always knew I was going to go grey early because my mum did and my dad was grey um and when I was about twenty one I got the first few and I kind of you know thought well actually it's quite interesting it makes you more interesting having but of course once you actually get to the age where it just takes over your whole head it's a different story. I was having a conversation with Peter at the weekend about it because I'd just been to the the hairdressers and he's got quite a big patch of it and he said do you think I should go to the hairdresser [laughs] do you think I should go and sort mine out because I'm beginning to notice it a lot you know. That's the first time he's sort of er become conscious of that sort of thing*

In this extract, Petra reminds us that grey hair, one of the first symbols of growing older, can occur even at a young age (she was twenty one). When you have only a few, however, and you are young it can be described as *interesting* which I take to mean that it is relatively unproblematic, particularly if you are young, to have a few grey hairs. Indeed, the unusualness of it could possibly work towards it being thought of as a positive attribute. However, she counters this: *but of course once you actually get to the age where it just takes over your whole head it's a different story*. It is given as 'obvious' and 'normal' to find it problematic, when one has more than just a few. *You* is used generically to show that these feelings are applicable to everyone. Moreover, what is encoded in *it's a different story* remains unstated between us. I do not need to know why the *story* is *different*, that is part of the cultural knowledge that Petra and I share, that most people do not like to have grey hair. In fact, Petra goes on to exemplify her points relaying the story about her husband's thoughts after she has just been to the hairdresser to have her own hair dyed. He questions whether he should be doing something about his own grey hair, now he has so much. Note that I need no further explanation as to why he would consider such a step, or what he has become conscious of (*That's the first time he's sort of er become conscious of that sort of thing).* It is assumed that I know. Petra then goes on to describe her recent visit to the hairdresser and a conversation she overheard between the hairdressers and another customer:

Extract 14

I: *I mean most people colour their hair*

P: *yeah I think most people do although interestingly enough there was a lady um in there on Saturday and they said um she had pretty much white hair really um and she was saying um I I want to do something with it because it's a bit of a dirty colour and I wondered if there was anything you could do you know do you have anything like silver colour and er or something that would actually make it grey rather than and they were saying oh that's interesting they got all their books out and they were saying well we did have this one but we never have it in stock because nobody ever asks for it nobody ever asks to go grey if you see what I mean [laughs]*

I: *yeah I know what you mean there's different sorts of grey aren't there*

P: *yes there are yeah and she felt her's wasn't didn't do anything for her sort of thing so she was um and it was quite interesting their reaction to it it was kind of you know they were really up oh that's really interesting and it was kind of a challenge for them*

I: *something different to do*

P: *yes. And they said ooh we'll get it in for you cos there's this various shades of silver we can do for you and all this sort of stuff. We'll just put a few in to make it [laughs] to make I was thinking no I want mine all covered up [laughs]*

In this extract, another woman at the hairdresser's is asking for her hair to be dyed, but to be dyed silvery grey, rather than for the grey to be hidden. It is evident that the hairdressers are surprised and do not automatically keep grey shades in stock (*we did have this one but we never have it in stock because nobody ever asks for it nobody ever asks to go grey).* The hairdressers are also intrigued, and are quite pleased to be given a chance to do something different and offer to help the woman achieve her goal (*And they said ooh we'll get it in for you cos there's this various shades of silver we can do for you).* Notice, however, that while Petra reports the hairdressers as saying that nobody asks to go grey, there is a differentiation, first by the customer (she wants a *silver colour* rather than *a bit of a dirty colour*) and by the end of the extract, even for the hairdressers, *grey* has become defined and re-evaluated as: *various shades of silver*. Silver, it could be argued, carries with it connotations or associations of value (for example, silver is a precious metal), which *grey* in itself does not.

Indeed, grey can be (and is here) associated with dirt, and so is naturally to be avoided rather than sought out.

Petra, on the other hand, listening to the conversation, is clearly comparing herself to the other woman customer (after all, she is there for the same purpose) and discovers she wants to keep invisible her visible signs of ageing and she says to me: *I was thinking no I want mine all covered up.* The reasons why one might want to go to such lengths to hide grey hair is made more explicit in one of Petra's subsequent points, when she describes an incident when she had not dyed her hair for a while and someone commented on her relationship with her daughter:

Extract 15

P: *I think it's interesting having younger children as well because the age thing um I I left mine fairly grey for a bit and then um er somebody said to me is this your granddaughter when I was with Rachel*

I: *really*

P: *yeah and er and that's what I thought oh god that's interesting [laughs] you know it affected me more than I thought it would do*

Here Petra describes a time when she experienced being mistaken for her daughter's grandmother (rather than her mother). She describes her thoughts and feelings as: *oh god that's interesting*, but it is apparent that to be mistaken for an older person, with a different cultural role is not something she enjoyed: *it affected me more than I thought it would do.* Grey hair, then, is a very visible symbol which can lead to invisibility, or 'negative' assumptions by others. By covering up the visible signs of ageing, one is able to remain visible both to the external world, and visible as an adult, rather than as an old person.

It is also worth noting the contrast, though, between Petra's thoughts at being mistaken for her daughter's grandmother and the Yummy Grannies who appeared proud to have that role, promoting it publicly in the pages of the magazine. At least two of them (Edina and Eve) did not associate their cultural role negatively, as something to be avoided or hidden. Of course, they were actually grandmothers, while Petra is really Rachel's mother. On the other hand, we could suggest that the idea of flux and transition in what it means to be an older person is shown very evidently in the contrast. Petra, we could say, is holding on to the image of the stereotypical granny in the rocking chair (recall the image that was drawn out and defined at the beginning of the Yummy Grannies article), and it is something akin to that image with which she associates the mistake. Recall yet again, that stereotypes are selective descriptions and exaggerations (Perkins, 1996:22-23). By possessing one of the defining characteristics of the 'old' stereotype (in this case, grey hair) can, it seems, lead to unwanted classifications by others (that you are someone's grandmother). Petra's extract is also drawing upon all of the Myths of ageing and, in particular, that ageing must be resisted by adopting various strategies, for example, dyeing your hair. The other two Myths are also drawn upon too. Ageing as decline and as involving a loss of power is also evident: one adopts age resistant practices such as dyeing one's hair another colour instead of grey in order not to be classified as older, or a grandmother. To be classified as such, signals less status because one has become (and, moreover, looks like) an old person.

The Yummy Grannies seem to have successfully moved beyond the 'old' stereotype and are more positive about their stage of life, although it is possible that they have to be, because that is what they are: grandmothers. Even so, they are making considerable effort to justify their status as worthwhile, most notably in caring for their grandchildren. Petra, by contrast, does not want to be thought of as a grandparent, because she is not, but more than that,

because to be thought of as old enough to be a grandparent is not valued by all in our culture. I write 'by all' because the Yummy Grannies challenge the traditional model, and arguably do so very successfully. But the new model is not yet 'solid' enough, at least not to an extent where many people who are younger would look forward to becoming a granny, even a Yummy Granny. We also know this is true because of the conversation Petra overheard at the hairdressers: women do not generally dye their hair grey, even silver grey to accentuate their status as older women. They usually want the grey covered up as Petra wishes to do. This extends to the women celebrities who are photographed for the pages of the magazines: they rarely (if ever) have grey hair. In the next extract, with Sian, 44, I consider one of the ways in which these older celebrities function as role models.

Front cover: celebrity role models

Extract 16

I: *.....how how do you think growing older's talked about in these sort of magazines then what do you think*

Sian: *I mean I think in a lot of these that we're looking at here I think it's done in a really positive way I mean you can see here we've got on the title on the front cover we've got people who are in their forties and fifties I mean Dawn French is just coming up to fifty*

I: *Fifty yeah yeah*

Sian: *We've got Lulu who's well in her fifties and looks absolutely fantastic*

I: *Yeah yeah yeah Yes she does yeah*

Sian: *I presume she's had no work done there I don't know how much she's been airbrushed but she looks absolutely she looks better now to me than what she did you know in her younger days*

And a bit later, Sian returns once again to the topic of front covers:

Extract 17

Sian: *It's nice to see your age represented certainly you know that you're buying the magazine that you're not seeing somebody that's kind of young enough to be your daughter on the front cover cos I wouldn't if I saw that I wouldn't think necessarily that there would be anything interesting for my age group to read inside but if I'm reading you know the person on the cover so you know they're your age category and you think god of course that's why they put them on the front cover cos you think that draws you in look at Lulu look she looks fantastic at 50 wow we all want what she's on yeah okay so that sort of you know yeah Sharon Stone all of those*

I: *'More beautiful than when you were at twenty'*

Sian: *Is that Sharon Stone?*

I: *yeah*

Sian: *she's forty seven*

In these extracts Sian is drawing attention to the fundamental way in which magazines draw the targeted readership in: the front cover. McCracken (1996) is explicit on this all-important aspect of the magazines. A magazine cover is crucial on a number of levels. It defines the magazine, the advertisers and the reader. Thus, the woman who is portrayed on the cover is key, and works towards positioning readers ideologically, perhaps making them feel inferior, but, at the same time, allowing them the possibility that they, too, can with effort, become like the woman on the front cover. Buying the magazine is, of course, the first step on the way to achieving that goal (McCracken, 1996:99). Celebrities, or other well known personalities, almost always appear on the front cover, particularly of the monthly magazines. Sian appears to embrace the new positivity often associated with getting older today, by drawing attention to the mid life women who grace the covers (*I think it's done in a really positive way* and *I mean Dawn French is just coming up to fifty*).

McCracken's main point is that the cover as a cultural signifier is designed specifically to play on the anxieties and insecurities the reader may have (which may be remedied if attention is paid to the contents of the magazine) and this aspect is exemplified by Sian. In the case of titles such as those I have looked at, particularly the covers of the monthly magazines, the choice of (celebrity) woman actually goes part of the way in alleviating anxiety about the ageing process, for some women at least. Indeed, Sian goes on in her subsequent turn to explain that seeing a celebrity on the front cover with whom she can identify, in an age related way, is pretty crucial in her decision to buy the magazine (*look at Lulu look she looks fantastic at 50 wow we all want what she's on).* Indeed, Sian, in the first extract, considers that the singer, Lulu, *looks better now to me than what she did you know in her younger days* and this comment echoes something similar in the second extract, when Sian remarks upon the actor, Sharon Stone and I repeat the strap line associated with Dior's advertising campaign for Capture Totale, an anti ageing skin cream, fronted by Stone: *More beautiful than when you were at twenty*. The possibility is currently being presented that women (or some women, and particularly celebrity women) can in fact be more physically attractive when they are older, even more so than when they were younger. The connotations associated with the image of the woman on the cover signify to Sian that the contents of the magazine will interest her, firstly because the woman on the front cover is in her age range, and secondly, because she looks *fantastic* which means that Sian feels she can too. We can suggest, therefore, that the woman on the cover functions metonymically, because she is standing for the whole magazine's contents, but more than that, that she is standing in for all mid life women and the potential they may achieve.

Moreover, Sian's reaction to the celebrities on the front cover suggests that she is happy to accept the reading position she is being offered by the magazine. She is being presented with

a cultural role model, a celebrity such as Lulu, who looks great as an older woman and there is an assumption that readers such as Sian will aspire to the package that is presented by the image on the cover.

On the other hand, there may be other readers, however, who would view the women on the covers as anxiety provoking, although not necessarily in the sense that McCracken refers to. I am drawing attention to those of my informants (Adina, Jane and Alison) who perceived the content of the articles as playing on some people's insecurities. It is possible, therefore, that for those readers, the contents of the magazine would reinforce rather than alleviate the type of anxiety McCracken refers to as reproduced by the good looking celebrity on the cover. I cannot be certain of this, however, as I did not have a conversation about magazine covers with all of my informants.

From start to finish

In order to sum up the findings of this chapter, I would like to consider an extract from the interview with Laura, 64, another one of my informants:

Extract 18

L: Well I've never been sure where the midlife was nobody's ever said it begins at sort of forty or fifty or er so I dunno

I think this extract encapsulates one of the principal ideas upon which this thesis is based: the idea that whatever the midlife is, its point of entry is no longer fixed (if it ever was) to a particular chronological age, and that whatever it is, and whenever it starts is up for negotiation and remoulding, at least to an extent. These factors allow the magazines and the women who read them a space to become aware of the increased 'choices' they have as older

women, and consequently to feel 'positive' about them (recall Lesley Garrett, the Opera Singer, who described her life as getting better and how women were told they could do 'anything'). In fact, they are directed to feel positive. But the idea of fluidity or flux in what it means to be an older person also allows some women to contest and resist the new 'positivity' by challenging its manifestations.

We saw, for example, in the words of Adina, Jane and Alison particularly, their resistance to what they interpreted as the magazine's central message: that, in order to age 'successfully' one had to continue to subscribe to youthful values, particularly those of attractiveness and status in life. They made observations about a type of anxiety that can be created, an anxiety which comes not as a result of a reduction of opportunities available as one becomes older, but because there appear to be more of them. If older women are not, therefore, taking advantage of the different 'new' ways of being older and not achieving what is presented as possible to achieve, they may feel they have failed. The many opportunities that are presented to them in the pages of the magazines, which include such phenomena as choosing cosmetic surgery, having a baby in one's forties, remaining at the top of one's (highly successful) career are presented as positive choices. Not to take advantage of them, or not to view those opportunities positively, shows resistance to something 'obviously' beneficial. It challenges the new positivity that is popularly associated with growing older and, moreover, it demonstrates that some midlife women are resisting being positioned as those who would 'naturally' and 'obviously' want to 'fight' ageing. This is not because those women simply accept that ageing involves a decline and a loss of power, it is more the case that they reject the cultural norms which they perceive women are subjected to in the twenty-first century, upon which the Myths of ageing are based. 'Superwoman' (Van Zoonen, 1991:36) may be alive and well, but not to aspire to be just like her doesn't have to mean you are a failure.

Sometimes the choices are presented overtly in articles that deal specifically with women who have attained success through taking advantage of the opportunities that become available. And sometimes the choices are presented as supporting evidence in articles that have another, seemingly different, main focus. In the chapter on age gap relationships, for example, Liz Jones's relationship appears to be the central focus of the article, but her relationship is situated within the wider context of her lifestyle and activities (successful journalistic career, going to the gym, the food she eats and the music she listens to), and we could argue that she is only able to take advantage of a relationship with a much younger man because she has succeeded in successfully remaining 'young' in other areas of her life. It seems to be the case that some of my informants were highlighting an awareness that these were cultural values rather than 'natural' values and that, for them, perhaps, successful ageing is more about having the confidence to resist the new positivity that informants such as Sian seemed to associate with some of what was written in the magazines. On the other hand, Sian also talked about confidence and being older. It is as if confidence is represented as a by product of successful ageing. Successful ageing is about acceptance of who you are, about *looking good for your age* (Sandra, as evaluated by the young men) rather than *trying too hard* (Avril, in the way she would classify herself if she had situated herself in the 'young' room). But there is also another model of what it is to be successful at ageing. The first model is that you adopt age resistant strategies but not to such an extent that it is obvious that you're trying to act and dress much younger than your (biological) years, because there are certain behaviours and codes of dress which are (culturally) linked to your age. You are confident, then, because you look good, but you have accepted your age. The second model is the confidence that comes with explicitly being able to resist being positioned as a woman

who is so insecure within herself that she resorts to extreme measures (for example, cosmetic surgery).

Perhaps we can align the resistance evidenced by those of my informants who seem to fit better with the second model with the traces that are apparent in Andie MacDowell's interview, where she questions the young journalist who asks her how she feels about losing her beauty or with Jane Fonda who argues that older women don't have so much to lose as they aren't in the market (for a man) any longer. But as we discussed, it is debatable whether MacDowell or Fonda are really resistant: MacDowell, as we noted, was quite compliant with Hollywood attitudes and Fonda highlighted the importance of good lighting to minimise wrinkles, which in itself demonstrates an acceptance of the cultural value associated with youth. My informants too, are not united within themselves to a particular position: for example, no one seemed to enjoy the idea of grey hair, even those who appear to resist age resistance strategies and age resistant discourses. With that in mind, there can be an awareness of one's own position as contradictory: Catherine, for example, recognised this element of contradiction within herself when she acknowledged that she was very interested in the latest fashions and what might look good at a particular age. At the same time, she rebelled against the *mutton dressed as lamb* metaphor, an idea which is concerned with confining oneself to age appropriate clothing and the ridicule one might encounter in not adhering to these ideals. Catherine was positioning herself as someone who seemed to be challenging the Myth that ageing involves a loss of power, including the ability to determine what to wear and what might be appropriate to wear.

The magazine data supports this. As we have seen, celebrities, too, can be read as adopting a contradictory position, whether they are aware of so doing or not. MacDowell, for example,

argues that a person has natural beauty at 80, or that she has never seen a face lift that looks good (meaning that it is always obvious when someone has had one). However, within the same magazine, and others like it, she is advertising hair colorant and anti ageing skin cream. MacDowell, unlike my informants, Adina, Alison and Jane, is not resisting being positioned as a woman who wants to carry on being beautiful or does not want to resist ageing. But she seems, however, to be challenging the Myth that ageing is a decline scenario (at least to a certain extent) using herself (and other celebrities that she mentions) as an example of successful ageing.

And as we have observed, Fonda promotes the idea that women who are older can be themselves and please themselves, but she herself is concerned with her appearance as we have discussed, by minimising the appearance of wrinkles. What we can also suggest is that the thoughts and feelings of my informants and the fact that those feelings cannot very often be tied into to a unified position on ageing help towards verifying the observation I made about the title page of the article, *Ageless Glamour* in the chapter concerning Celebrities. Recall that I noted that feelings about ageing appeared to be reduced to a binary opposition (*embrace/dread*) with a third more passive choice (*not thinking about it*). I also noted that it was unlikely women would in reality consistently feel one way about what was happening to them both biologically and culturally and this seems to be the case, at least for several of the women I spoke to. Even those who appeared to adopt the more passive approach of claiming that they didn't think much about ageing (for example, Avril) are still affected by cultural notions of appropriateness and know that they have to modify their behaviour in certain situations. Recall Thwaites et al's (2002:69) point that myth is a site where there can be struggles for meaning and this is what seems to be happening, both in the pages of the magazines and in the thoughts and feelings of my informants.

I would like to move on now to my last point in this chapter. There is one particularly crucial aspect about these interviews which has, so far, not been discussed: the interviewer and her role in co-constructing her interlocutors' interpretations. The last section examines this process and the ways in which it manifests itself both within the interview data and the analysis of it.

Positioning the researcher and analyst in the interview process

As Featherstone & Wernick (1995:13) so eloquently put it:

> It is a distinctive feature of the human sciences, especially where the focus is on understanding some aspect of present-day society, that the subject of knowledge is never wholly outside the object it seeks to understand.

Featherstone & Wernick are referring to the authors of the individual chapters in their edited collection (*Images of Aging*), making the point that they are almost all, without exception, members of the so-called baby boomer generation, who are: 'socially critical, narcissistically self-absorbed, and self-defined as forever young...' (ibid:13). They are highlighting the fact that academics working within cultural studies who fall into this profile are becoming interested in researching the sociocultural manifestations of the ageing process that they themselves are starting to undergo. This fact is relevant for this research, because I am a member of the baby boomer generation and also because I fit the readership profile of the magazines under study. As I have mentioned elsewhere, I am the 'you' referred to in many of the articles, hailed and interpellated (Althusser, 1971), so that I recognise myself in what is being drawn out and described. I have acknowledged this within Chapter 3 where I discuss my research methodology and within Chapters 5, 6 and 7 where I include sections suggesting the ways in which readers are positioned by the texts under study.

In this section, I consider it is appropriate to take a reflexive stance towards my own input into the interview process. I would like to argue that the net effect of my own position in this research adds greater insight to it. This is firstly because the research would not have happened at all had it not been that I, as a magazine reader myself and member of the baby boomer generation, developed an interest in how getting older was represented in these media publications. Secondly, it would have been very hard, if not impossible for me to remain completely detached from the interview process, if for no other reason than I am a woman myself with a very similar sociocultural profile to most of my informants. Rather than seeing that as a potential for misrepresentation or bias, I argue that the way I was both positioned by this research and my own position within it, has enabled me to access a more accurate view of my informants' attitudes and perceptions.

Most importantly. the attitudes, perceptions and feelings that I was attempting to access were very personal, amounting to quite significant amounts of self disclosure at times. As I observed in Chapter 3, it seems unlikely that a woman of 35+ is going to feel comfortable revealing her thoughts and feelings on an arguably very sensitive topic with a young male interviewer or even with someone who appeared uninterested in what was being revealed. As I have also detailed in Chapter 3, I came to this conclusion partly on the basis of the first interview that I conducted with Karen (a pilot), someone I knew very well. Trying to remain 'detached' from the interview proved impossible and it was clear very early on that I would have to alter this stance. I would argue, however, that far from invalidating the data that I collected, it enhances it. Karen felt comfortable discussing quite personal stories with me and felt more able (I believe) to be more open about her experiences. From then on, as I have described, I related to each informant in a manner appropriate to my relationship with them. To take another example, when I conducted the interview with Avril, it was the first time I

had met her. This is very evident in the extract I reproduce at the beginning of this Chapter (see Extract 1). Avril's distancing strategies, which I discuss, are I think, driven in part by the fact that she had never met me before and perhaps did not feel comfortable at that stage in the interview (the start) in revealing her personal feelings to me. As the interview progressed and Avril relaxed, she felt more able to reveal experiences and feelings to me. My own behaviour during the interviews I conducted assisted with this: I tried to keep the process relatively informal in order to put informants at ease. Hollway's (1989:11) point is very relevant to these interview contexts. On the one hand, treating interviews as enjoyable conversations can make a researcher feel as if they are somehow undermining or trivialising the research process. Looking back on what has happened, however, allows the researcher to understand the value of such an approach.

It is evident in the extracts I have reproduced that I have participated in the interviews, not simply by being a vehicle to ask questions but in the contributions I make, or do not make. Very often, for example, the sociocultural knowledge that informants and I share is apparent, either by the way we discuss topics or, conversely, in the way that certain points need no elaboration. For example, on hearing Sandra's story of meeting the young men in the street who say *aren't you pretty for an old lady*, I comment *oh god* because, sharing similarities with Sandra (I'm a mother and of a similar age), I can imagine how I might have felt in that situation. And if I had not shared my own thoughts, it is entirely possible Sandra might have felt less comfortable analysing how she felt with me. Here, I draw on Oakley (1981:30-61) who discusses the impossibility and, moreover, the undesirability of remaining detached from the interview process in certain situations. Although her research (which involved women's transition into motherhood) involved repeated interviews over a period of time, some aspects, particularly those of self disclosure or discussions of anxieties and doubts may be similar.

Detachment in this context is impossible, and, moreover, undesirable: it lessens the likelihood of an accurate account.

Finally, I would like to discuss the following extract from my interview with Adina, 40, to emphasise the points I am making. This section of the interview occurred towards the end, where we were discussing the pop icon, Madonna, in tandem with the phrase that I had encountered many times within the magazines: *trying too hard*:

Extract 19

Ad: *And I mean I don't like that muscle-ly look that Madonna's got anyway I don't really like that anyway*

I: *It looks a bit strange*

Ad: *I don't like that going on anyway she looks like she's really desperately trying to stop there and I think when desperation comes into it it's not attractive that's trying too hard*

I: *That's quite interesting working it when you talk through with someone when you work it through with someone what you mean what we mean by these phrases and that's exactly how I would say Madonna is trying too hard*

Ad: *Trying too hard yeah desperately trying to do something that nobody*

I: *I wouldn't say Twiggy is trying too hard even though she's obviously made up to the hilt she's made up there but then anyone can get made up for something*

Ad: *No that is really trying too hard*

I: *Yes that's quite interesting so we cracked that phrase*

Ad: *We cracked that phrase [laughs]*

It is evident that, by the end of this part of the conversation, we have come to a conclusion about *trying too hard*, what it means and how it is epitomised in the form of the lifestyle and activities of Madonna. It is clear that I am as much a participant in this conversation with Adina and we have co-constructed our words to come to a conclusion about the intrinsic meaning of a certain cultural phrase. I do not consider the conclusion we arrived at to be any

less valid because I am involved in making it. On the contrary, it lends validity to the analysis. As Tolson (1996:xiv) observes, as members of the same culture, we have access to the same meaning systems which allows us to come to particular interpretations of texts. I think what is important about this extract is that it demonstrates how at ease my informants became with the style of interviewing that I adopted. It certainly reduced the asymmetrical nature inherent in most interview situations, allowing my informants the space to co-construct with me interpretations of what I consider to be key cultural patterns and ways of conceptualising the ageing process.

Chapter 9: Concluding comments

In this thesis I set out to investigate how age and ageing are represented, and what cultural constructions could be found in a selection of women's magazine titles. My hypothesis, around which this thesis is based, was that what it means to be an 'older' person in Britain today is being re-negotiated and re-defined in a more positive way. I drew on a linguistic and semiotic framework and examined how these constructions were underpinned by several myths (see Chapter 4). I identified three major cultural myths associated with the ageing process. These were: firstly, that ageing is a decline scenario: it involves both mental and physical decline; secondly, that ageing is synonymous with loss of power: sexual, economic and social; and lastly that ageing must be resisted. My work was guided by the research questions which I detailed in Chapters 1 and 4. I summarise below brief answers to those research questions and then continue with a discussion which elaborates on those answers.

The first research question asked what representations of age and ageing were portrayed in women's magazines aimed at the 35+ market? The answer was that the portrayals of age and ageing appear to challenge traditional images of ageing and the magazines often present representations which are glamorous, attractive and sexy and which foreground status and success.

Next, I asked whether the construction of an 'age identity' is underpinned by the Myths of Ageing which I had identified. I argued that it is, no matter whether it is traditional images of ageing that are being drawn upon, or the new, more 'positive' representations.

My third question was to establish the main linguistic and semiotic devices employed in these representations. I drew upon a variety, but those that stood out were pronoun usage, particularly the use of *you, I, we* and *they.* All of these had the effect of positioning readers in a systematic way, for example, as 'obviously' being concerned about ageing; as 'naturally' choosing to resist ageing or in being positioned as members of groups of women, sharing similar feelings, ideals and goals. Metonymy was another key device. Metonymy, which describes the process by which something is signified by something which is closely associated with it, or a part of it, highlights the selective aspect to the representations we came across. The idea of selectivity is essential in understanding the processes which the Myths of Ageing produce and in understanding how the concept of stereotyping works to reinforce those Myths.

My last research question asked what the relationship was between the representations in the media texts and the attitudes and perceptions towards age and ageing of readers of those texts. What meanings did they derive from the representations? This part of the research involved interviewing magazine readers in order to give me insights into how these texts are received and, crucially, how readers are positioned (and, moreover, position themselves) in relation to these texts. I concluded that there were several key viewpoints that were expressed. These ranged from a wholesale embrace of the 'new positivity' that is often portrayed to a clear resistance to 'age resistant' practices. Moreover, some informants wanted to distance themselves from the ageing process by conveying to me that ageing didn't bother them at all. I will now elaborate upon these points.

The theoretical framework that I used in order to analyse both text and talk was based on Barthes's (1972) theories of denotation, connotation and myth, which provide a compelling framework for analysing popular culture. In Barthes's terms, while denotation provides the literal description of whatever text and visual images one is analysing, the connotations reflect the cultural associations that are part of the text. The connotations and cultural associations that come into play when we are presented with texts and images draw on and perpetuate certain myths. Myths describe connotations which have become so acceptable and naturalised within a particular culture that we do not question them. We draw on them in our thinking and in our behaviour and they structure our realities and truths. They give us the means with which we make sense of the cultural representations that we come across in our lives, in text and talk (see Barker & Galasínski, 2001:5). Barthes's theories have been essential in understanding how what is represented in the magazines may be interpreted as 'commonsense' or 'obvious' ways to think about certain phenomena, in this case, the 'natural' way to view age and growing older. Barthes's theories allows us to unpack several layers in our textual analysis, including analysis of visual images that often accompany written texts in media publications.

Because myths are highly selective in the way they underpin and structure what is represented, very often a dominant idea can have the effect of validating a whole system or way of doing things and so myth functions metonymically (see Thwaites et al, 2002:68-69). This guiding principle was reflected repeatedly within the analysis. For example, we saw in the chapter on age gap relationships how Linda behaved in an age appropriate way, not chasing James, who was so much younger than her, allowing him to decide that the relationship was the one that he wanted, both because he is the man and because he is younger. The myth that ageing involves a loss of power, sexual in this case is shown to lead

to certain age appropriate behaviour, which I have described in the case of Linda. This allowed Linda to present herself as a somewhat passive figure at times, where other people's needs and opinions are highlighted as more important than her own. Or consider the case of Andie MacDowell, the actor, who describes her acceptance of not being offered as much work as when she was younger. Here we are witnessing the loss of power in both an economic and sexual sense, as the way of apportioning work, by giving more to younger people, is presented as a normal and obvious occurrence. Once again, a certain passivity is apparent in her seemingly uncritical acceptance of Hollywood norms, at least in relation to being offered work. However, as we saw later, MacDowell did question some aspects of the status quo. Neither the behaviour of Linda or the acceptance of Andie MacDowell need explanation for the readership because their behaviour is framed by the cultural myths in play concerning older age. Hence, the way readers read these type of texts and consequently understand what is written, is within a meaning system which prioritises youth and youthful values and these seem to be entirely 'natural'.

I also drew extensively on the idea that Myth is a place where struggles for meanings occur (Thwaites et al 2002:69). This is because one underpinning principle idea of the thesis is that there is shift in the meanings of what it is to be older, and what it is possible to be when one is older in late modern Western societies and that there has been a merging of lifestyle, dress and activities across the generations (see Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991:371; Meyrowitz, 1985:227). It can be argued that the shift in ideas of what it means to be older was overtly apparent in Chapter 5 where we considered modern grandmother identities. In the article analysed in that Chapter, readers were presented with a representation of grandparenthood which involved glamour, continued attractiveness, high status and the continuation of a parenting role, beyond the cultural milestone of forty. The continuation was shown in two

ways: firstly, the grandmothers carried on taking responsibility for the well-being of their own (now grown-up) children (recall Edina recounting that she looked after her grandchild overnight once a week, just as her own mother did for her when Edina's daughter was a small baby). And, secondly, in this way, the grandmother extends the parenting role to take responsibility for the grandchild as well. Here I drew on Marshall (1991) and Johnston & Swannson (2003a&b) to show how this has the effect of perpetuating certain myths and discourses in relation to a woman's role and position in relation to her children (and then her grandchildren). Thus, the article sets up the idea that women can continue to be useful in relation to children and child rearing, even though they are older. Recall that this differs from Itzin's earlier (1986) study of *Woman* magazine which argued that women were represented as being far less useful once they had passed the menopause and had lost the ability to have children and to participate as sexually attractive beings as far as men were concerned.

The idea of continued responsibility and usefulness is very significant and I argue the article about grandmother identities was the most overt of those that I analysed in signalling the major shift in the consideration of what being older person, and particularly an older woman is about currently in Western societies. This is because not only did it encompass many aspects of a woman's life, for example, career, familial roles and responsibilities, but it also foregrounded the new positivity that we have discussed as one of the major defining characteristics associated with new versions of older age (see Gott, 2005). We saw this very clearly in the way the article made a direct contrast between modern 'grannies' and the stereotypical image of the granny, which was being confined to the past. Although traditional versions of old age are associated with evaluations such as 'sweet', what is being promoted today is someone who would not be defined in that way. *Sweet* carries with it connotations of childlike behaviour and helplessness. The concept of a stereotype is what both Allport

(1979) and Perkins (1996) call an exaggerated construction, which may either be a positive or negative evaluation or a person or a thing. A few features enable a very selective ideal to be described. Stereotypes are underpinned by Myths and in the sense that they stand in for a whole category or idea, highlight that they are in themselves metonymic (see Thwaites et al, 2002:128).

Today, the older woman, who may also be a grandmother, is portrayed as someone who is far more independent and resourceful, a decision maker, someone who has a fulfilling, full and eventful life, whose role is valued, and importantly, someone who can also be thought of as glamorous and attractive. The old 'stereotype', though, has not been completely forgotten. The *sweet old lady in the rocking chair* remains to be drawn upon as a warning of the kind of existence that could await us all if we do not take care to remodel and rework ourselves in as similar way as possible to those who have been chosen as representations of the new old age. The *sweet old lady* (or a very similar construct) was also alluded to by one my informants, Sian, who reiterated that the stereotype belongs in the past, not in the sense that the stereotype was represented as older biologically, but because it was outdated. The sense of outdated-ness relating to the older 'stereotype' continues in the 'shortie' that accompanied the article on the Yummy Grannies, which contained *8 rules for Yummy Grannies*. These were described as *tips on modern grandparenting* from *The Good Granny Guide.* These 'rules' draw heavily on the idea that older women needed to keep up to date with 'modern' apparatus and ideas. And, moreover, there are clearly regulations which need to be laid down and defined, if a grandmother is to be not only yummy, but a modern and, what is more, a good grandmother.

The new representation of being a grandmother, as modelled by the three Yummy Grannies, is seemingly more 'favourable' than the old one. To that extent, then, we could argue that there is an attempt here, both within this article, and in the book that is referred to as part of the article, to construct a new stereotype, but it relies for its understanding on the old stereotype (an image which can be reliably produced by all of us) in the sense that it provides a total contrast. Recall Perkins' (1996:22) point that people measure themselves against the various stereotypes that they come across, so this proves to be a very effective way of reinforcing the old stereotype. Recall also that Van Zoonen (1991:36) draws attention to the 'Superwoman' construct (another stereotype): the woman who is successful in all spheres of her life. In this way, we can see how the different representations of growing older are pulled together, drawing on various Myths about women including motherhood myths, interwoven with Myths about older people and older women in particular. By making an explicit contrast between the 'old' stereotype (negative) and in attempting to establish some new ones (positive), in these transitional times, women appear to be presented with 'choices' about what it is possible to be when one is older.

The work that other scholars have conducted into age and ageing has also been key in developing a theoretical framework for this project. As I stated earlier (see Chapter 2), within the Academy, work into the cultural nature of age and ageing has been somewhat scarce certainly until the last twenty years or so. This has certainly been the case within sociolinguistics where work had concentrated mainly on such aspects as age graded features of speech (for example, slang). There is a more fully developed body of work within what could broadly be described as the field of cultural studies, and it is this that I have drawn upon in order to broaden the analysis. For example, this study has been heavily influenced by Margaret Gullette's critique (see, for example, 1997; 2004) of the way in which ageing is

culturally constructed in terms of decay and decline and the stereotypical beliefs about the onset of the decline which occurs when one becomes or recognises oneself as middle aged. Her theories have allowed me to develop and adapt Barthes's concepts in an appropriate way in order to perform a linguistic and semiotic analysis of both text and talk. Other scholars' work that has been particularly influential for this study include Featherstone & Hepworth's (1991) *The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course*, which details the concept of the 'Mask' and describes the 'split' between the age the older individual feels and considers her/himself to be and what they see in the mirror, which is how others perceive them to be. The idea of self-perception versus perception by others is remarkably prominent, particularly in the interview data. For example, an informant (Catherine) asserted that one should wear whatever clothes one wanted to wear (so a woman could perhaps wear miniskirts at an older age) but at the same time, she acknowledged that she herself was driven by what might be considered appropriate and fashionable to wear at her age.

Three of the central chapters of the thesis, those that deal with textual analysis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), are organised around themes, each dealing with a topic which allowed me to pay close attention to how ageing is represented culturally. I looked at the role of the modern grandmother, next I considered celebrities as cultural role models and thirdly I considered relationships. The thesis could have been organised around another set of themes but the choice of themes turns out to have been unimportant because very similar and related aspects emerged in each of the three chapters. Therefore, I argue that the themes that were selected operated simply as a vehicle which allowed me to explore many facets of life as it is constructed for and about older people. For example, although none of the chapters was centred directly around the topic of attractiveness to men, nevertheless what that involves was apparent in each of the themes and in each of the central chapters.

The concept of 'attractiveness' also allows us to observe that heterosexual relationships and heteronormativity are prominently foregrounded: it is rare to come across texts which allude to or even define relationships homosexually. To that extent, heterosexuality is unquestioned and taken-for-granted. Whether or not a woman is attractive (or considers herself to be attractive), attractiveness, and specifically attractiveness to men, is a key ideal running throughout not only the articles I analyse, but throughout women's magazines in general. The quality, if it could be described as such, is tied into physical looks and only exceptionally into personality characteristics. Because of this, it becomes intrinsically tied up with the biological, physical markers of ageing. There was one example where attractiveness was connected to personality and this was where the actor, Andie MacDowell, described *bitterness,* a behavioural characteristic, as something which was not attractive. The implication was that if an older woman displayed traits of bitterness, because she felt she had been disadvantaged, perhaps in connection with lack of work as she was older, that would be unattractive.

Attractiveness itself is associated very specifically with younger age groups. We know this because of the clothes that younger women are 'allowed' to wear. As Mariella Frostrup tells us, one cannot wear miniskirts after the age of forty. Recall, however, that this idea was challenged by Catherine, one of my informants. Then there are the surgical procedures that are available under the category of 'cosmetic surgery'. These procedures are available to make women more physically attractive and to make them look younger, therefore one quality becomes synonymous with the other (youth equals attractiveness). Once again, there were challenges to these ideals by my informants, specifically, Adina, Alison and Jane. Jane,

in particular, distanced herself very overtly from being positioned as the type of woman who would even consider such procedures.

But the ideal of attractiveness is continually promoted as feasible for the older woman if she does take care of herself and if she does take part in age resistant strategies, perhaps cosmetic surgery, or, less extremely, using anti-ageing skin cream. Remaining attractive at an older age is shown to readers in a very explicit way: on the front cover, for example, where there is usually a very prominent celebrity woman who is older (for example, Jane Fonda, Twiggy, Nigella Lawson). As Sian, one of my informants, noted, these celebrities (or, to be more precise, their images) draw midlife women in: we recognise them, we know they belong to our age category, and therefore we consider the magazine's contents will be for us.

Attractiveness, or to be more precise, glamour and looks generally were aspects that were heavily foregrounded for the Yummy Grannies: they were capable women, whether in the parenting role or in their careers, but for at least two of them appearance was important, looking glamorous, keeping fit and perhaps having some (surgical) procedures. For the celebrities, looking good is all important, taken for granted and highlighted consistently. Andie MacDowell mentioned being beautiful at all ages; and although Fonda attempted to distance herself from pleasing men and to emphasise that attractiveness is no longer a central concern when one is older, at the same she was highly concerned to appear with as few wrinkles as possible in media publications. Linda and Liz, the women who were in relationships with men who were younger than they were, both displayed some elements of insecurity in relation to themselves and their looks. Liz, for example, spent some time analysing the idea that she had read about in a newspaper which had suggested that women

can look ‘confusingly young’ today (which is of course tied in with Meyrowitz’s (1985:249) reference to a ‘uni-age behavioural style’, which simplistically means the merging of experiences, lifestyles, behaviour and dress across the generations).

To take another example of the type of behaviour or lifestyle which is promoted in articles in the magazines, we can consider that success in the public sphere is often depicted as possible for women currently, including for older women. This aspect was interwoven with the identities of many of the midlife women depicted in the articles. (The possible exception was of Linda Honeyfield, whose career was not forgrounded, although it was established that that might have been to foreground her qualities as a mother in order to define the relationship with James.) The Yummy Grannies, for example, were all successful high profile women, two worked in the media and the third was a fashion designer. Liz Jones, who was married to a man eleven years her junior, was a successful journalist with published books. Two of the celebrities were well known actors, one was an opera singer and the other a journalist and presenter. But the theme of the tangibility of a successful career or lifestyle at an older age is foregrounded across the magazines generally; some articles deal with it very specifically, showing us examples of women who have achieved greatness either throughout their careers or even at a later age. It was these types of articles and the messages they conveyed which a number of my informants resisted. On the surface, the message is that women *can do anything* (at least according to Lesley Garrett, the opera singer), thus the ideal reader is a woman who may not have achieved her full potential but needs encouragement in order take the necessary steps to do so.

However, Adina, Alison and Jane resisted being positioned as readers who would find the messages positive, preferring instead to offer an alternative interpretation of the texts as having the potential to create anxiety, if those reading either had not achieved or could not achieve what was being presented as possible. This was also the case in terms of attractiveness and fashion: some informants resisted being positioned as readers who would consider surgical procedures an option which could be seriously considered (for example, Jane in the case of cosmetic surgery). Some (for example, Catherine in the case of fashion) resisted being positioned as readers who needed to be guided as to the appropriate clothing to wear for one's age. On the other hand, there were some (and here, Sian is an example) who accepted the dominant reading positions and took up many of the addressee roles that they were being presented with (see Thwaites et al, 2002:92). Sian engaged with the idea that the cultural concept of being older today is quite different from a few decades ago. It is being lived and embodied by colleagues she interacts with at work and many of the celebrities who are discussed within the pages of the titles we looked at.

I have shown that, whatever images of older age have been constructed and defined, both in the magazines and in the interviews with my informants, they are still based upon a set of values which can be embodied in the three myths that I have identified, essentially myths of decline, a loss of power and age resistance. Moreover, these values have very little to do with biological ageing and its effects because in general these effects are minimal and any that are seemingly negative can be ameliorated (for most people) in any number of ways (for example, diet and exercise). What is more relevant is other people's perception of who you are and how old you are which cements the biological marker of age through cultural means. We saw this clearly in the case of one of the interview informants, Sandra, when she meets the group of young men who classify her as *pretty for an old lady*. Sandra does not feel very

old: recall she thinks: *I'm not that old* but she realises that the young men perceive her as such. It is their interpretation that matters, rather than how old Sandra considers herself to be.

Avril displayed this as well, by avoiding being in the room with the young invitees when she was at a family celebration. She did not want to be perceived negatively by them by attempting to be part of their group. She chooses the room with the *old aunts*, but in so doing she is categorising not only herself, but others as well. In the magazine articles I analysed, the factor of perception, and hence evaluation by others is also very important. In the chapter on celebrities, for example, we noted how Andie MacDowell took for granted the fact that she would be discriminated against in terms of the amount of work she was likely to be offered because she was older. She claimed that, by not becoming bitter over the likely consequences of the ageing process, she could remain in work. She would be perceived as marketable still, despite her increasing years. And as much as Fonda argues that women can be more radical in their later years, because they don't have to worry about attracting a man, this is only because they are not supposed to be defining themselves in sexual terms anymore: they are 'past' that time of their lives. Once again, the idea of age appropriate behaviour is at work, defining and describing activities and attitudes that may be displayed. Some attributes and features are represented as 'okay', or are even promoted, for all ages, for instance, a working role, keeping fit, certain styles of clothing. But some are clearly not: recall that miniskirts, for example, are quite controversial.

A further, crucial factor, which allowed me to consider why the current Myths of Ageing are sites for struggles over meaning, is that of the baby boomer generation. Recall that this refers to a large and influential cohort of people born in the post war years between 1945 and 1963.

To a certain extent, the baby boomer generation have resisted being classified as older and ageing. Many of them were involved in the counter culture and anti establishment processes which occurred during the late 1950s and 1960s and they have been recognised as having a set of generational characteristics, for example, a non conformist nature. Observations about their considerable influence are not new: interest in ageing generally within academia has grown and this is probably due to the fact that many scholars fall into the category of those who are baby boomers (see Featherstone & Wernick, 1995:13 for a discussion of this point). We can argue that they have activated a change towards an interest in the cultural ageing process and can now get their collective voice heard both within the Academy and outside it because they are such a sizeable group.

So it is precisely because of their sheer numbers, and moreover, their spending power, that this influential group appear to have had a major impact in the redefinition of ageing that seems to be occurring both in terms of their own self perception but crucially (because that is the marker of success) in terms of how they are evaluated by others. All of the women who were the subjects of the articles under study fall into the category of baby boomers and most (but not all) of my interviewees did too. To an extent I am suggesting that the representations that are drawn out and defined in the magazines reveal additional characteristics about the baby boomers, most notably, that they are heavily implicated in a redefinition of the meanings of becoming older. The size of the group has ensured their ability to promote their own interests, one of which is a refusal to grow old in the same way as the generations that have preceded them. The lifestyles that are being drawn out for any of the women who are represented in the articles bear this out. None of them are interested in conforming to the old stereotype (*sweet old lady in a rocking chair*). They appear to want to challenge that model of growing older and write their own stories, in their relationships, with their successful

careers and in the way they take on the role of substitute parent for their grandchildren (recall Edina's statement, that she rather liked *the idea of going out with my granddaughter and looking glamorous*).

But as much as one can argue that the redefinition of becoming older seems to involve a way of life that is far removed from the old stereotype, what is really occurring is that the new model and ways of being older is essentially based upon exactly the same cultural beliefs and ideals about the ageing process and the premium that we in Western societies place upon youth. These beliefs are embodied in the Myths of Ageing which I have identified. Those Myths remain in place and are not affected by what could, at first glance, be regarded as quite fundamental changes in the ways in which we promote and classify older age groups. Therefore, I argue that the current state of flux and the attempts at a redefinition of ageing have had little impact on the underlying durable Myths: ageing continues to be viewed very negatively and is represented as having little to recommend it. That does not change: only the strategies and ways with which that negativity is dealt with changes. Cosmetic surgery, diet and exercise are some strategies; a successful career in later life is another. Cynically, we are also able to suggest that greater achievement is possible in terms of a career because demographics have changed: there are not enough younger people in the workforce and this has enabled those who are older to retain high status jobs.

Finally, it is important to think about the place of magazines in our culture. Drawing on scholars such as Johnston & Swanson (2003a&b), we can see that women's magazines are an important arena for the manufacture of cultural representations. This is primarily because of their ready availability and the fact they are read, at some time or another, by a large section

of the population. Women's magazines operate as a type of cultural manual, reflecting and reinforcing behavioural standards in terms of the ideological messages they convey. They do this, as I have shown, by their linguistic choices, their semiotic modes, the images they portray and the selective aspects of life that they deal with. And magazines aimed at older women do not do anything very different from those aimed at a younger market. The emphasis may be altered slightly, but similar topics are discussed and written about. The most important aspect to them is that the messages they convey and the way readers are positioned is based upon a series of factors which place a high premium on youthful values, particularly physical attractiveness, a youthful appearance and sexual eligibility. The Myths of Ageing underpin these values no matter whether what is being drawn out and defined is presented as a 'new' way to do older age or a more traditional, old fashioned way. It is still the same ideological message that is being conveyed. Resistance to ageing describes the new positivity, but nothing is really being resisted, at least not within the pages of the magazines. Instead, there is a wholesale embrace of the ultimate cultural Myth: that becoming an older person is not a positive experience and we must, therefore, obscure every possible sign that manifests in order to continue to be thought of as younger than we really are. When we can no longer do this, we must then acknowledge that we are older and behave appropriately, accepting our status, and making ourselves useful to the younger generations.

The message of the magazines is that if we have worked hard at age resistance, we might reap the rewards and continue to be thought of as useful, active members of our culture. This thesis has demonstrated that ageing is almost universally viewed (in Western cultures at least) as something very negative, even if the women who are represented within the pages of the magazines are shown to be ageing 'successfully'. As the proportion of older women (and men) increases in Western societies, magazines such as those which have been studied for

this thesis will continue to maintain and reinforce the meanings that we attach to becoming older. Those meanings or connotations are cultural rather than natural or biological and essentially remain exactly the same as they have done for decades. They are not positive. It is simply that the representations of ageing that we are now seeing in the pages of these magazines are representations of women coping with a culturally negative experience by reframing it as positive but only because there are more strategies available to them which enable them to continue to subscribe to youthful values. These values are rooted in the Myths of Ageing, the foundation of this thesis. These Myths define getting older as a process of decline, one which involves several types of loss and something which must, therefore, be resisted, both physically and mentally.

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Appendix A1

Interview guide

Interview Guide for Representations of Ageing

1. Ask for informant's name, age and occupation

2. Out of the following titles, which magazines do you read?
(Woman, WO, Best, Bella, EL, W&H, GH)

3. Do you buy these titles regularly?
If No then ask: occasionally/passed on by others

4. Is getting older something you think about?
If 'Yes' or 'Sometimes': Can you tell me about a time or a situation that occurred that made you think about getting older?

5. Do you feel comfortable with growing older?

6. Has life changed for you as you have become older?
[if 'Yes': in what ways has it changed?]

7. Is there anything different about becoming older today, do you think, than there used to be, say 20 years ago?

8. How do you think growing older is talked about in the magazines you read?

9. Do you think women's magazines present positive images of ageing?
If 'Yes' can you say why?
If 'Sometimes' can you give examples?
If 'No' can you give examples?

10. Do you find articles and information which refer to growing older interesting?
If 'Yes' or 'Sometimes'
In what ways?
If 'No'
Why not?

11. Are they realistic?
12. Are the photographs and other visual images realistic, do you think?

13. Do you find them useful in your own life?

14. What do you understand by the following words and phrases?

- good for her age
- mutton dressed as lamb
- trying too hard [rephrase]
- grown-up women
- mature women
- baby boomers
- toyboy
- becoming invisible
- mid life

15. What is your reaction to the following?

- mini-skirts after age 40
- cosmetic surgery
- anti-ageing creams
- The menopause
- HRT
- internet dating
- grey hair
- keeping fit
- cropped tee shirts
- having children after 40
- marrying a toyboy

16. What do you think of female celebrities such as: Madonna, Sharon Stone, Andie McDowell, Demi Moore

17. And what about their male counterparts? Clive Owen, Colin Firth, Michael Douglas, Mel Gibson, Bruce Willis

Appendix A2

Participant consent form

Roehampton University

ETHICS BOARD

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title and brief description of Research Project:
Title: Representations of Age and Ageing in a selection of women's magazine: a textual and semiotic analysis

The research consists of an analysis of selected magazine texts and an analysis of interviews conducted with women readers of those magazines. The goal of the interviews is to access interviewees' attitudes and perceptions to growing older. The interviews will last approximately 1½ hours and the investigator will make written notes. In addition, the interviews will be tape-recorded for ease of transcription.

Name and status of Investigator:
Shakuntala Soden (Satori)
PhD research student, Roehampton University

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, although the investigator will need to refer to my gender and to my age.

Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the investigator, or with the Director of Studies. The Director of Studies is:

Name: Professor Jennifer Coates
Contact Address:. School of Arts
Roehampton University
Roehampton Lane
London SW15 5PH

Direct Phone No: 020 8392 3710 Email: J.Coates@roehampton.ac.uk

Appendix T1

The rise of the Yummy Granny

The stereotype persists, but when did you last see a sweet old lady knitting in a rocking chair? Feisty Noughties grandmothers look great and often have flourishing careers. But one thing is guaranteed to make them weak at the knees – their beloved grandchildren

Edina: 'When I go to pick up Tabitha, I feel terribly excited – there's nothing quite like it'

Pilates, parties and face peels...

The rise of the yummy granny

'I rather like the idea of going out with my granddaughter and looking glamorous'

Fashion designer Edina Ronay, 62, lives in London with her husband Dick. They have two grown-up children and one grandchild, Tabitha, two

'To me, the image of grandmothers being stuffy and frumpy is really dated. That went out with the previous generation of women.

My granddaughter Tabitha is now two years old. Before she was born, I couldn't wait to become a granny. I was the first of my friends to be one and I felt extremely proud of the fact. I wasn't remotely worried about how people would perceive me once I was a grandmother. I think it's a natural progression for a woman to grow up and want to have children and, in the same way, it's natural for any mother to get older and want to have grandchildren.

Even before the birth, I suggested to my daughter Shebah that I take Tabitha for 24 hours at least once a week, so she had some time to herself. My own mother did it for me and it was fantastic. Looking after Tabitha is actually like having time off. It's a day I really look forward to. My husband and I take her swimming or to the park. Recapturing all the experiences you once shared with your own children is such fun, and you're much less anxious than you used to be. Obviously, you worry about their safety but the nature of your relationship takes away that constant pressure you feel as a mother.

I was 60 when Tabitha was born, so I was quite young, really. Age isn't important to me, probably

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because I'm not aware of it. I'm so busy, I don't think I behave like a 62-year-old, however that may be.

I've never worried about my appearance, and becoming a grandmother hasn't changed that because I've always thought I look good for my age. I rather like the idea of being out and about with my granddaughter and still looking glamorous. One of the most important things to do when you're a grandma is stay fit. I practise Pilates twice a week, go power walking and occasionally do yoga. Lugging Tabitha up the stairs can be quite a strain but I'm fit enough to handle it, and the energetic playing she demands.

Tabitha calls me "Dina". It wasn't particularly that I didn't want to be called Grandma, but when she first began to talk, she started picking up words naturally and calling me "Dina" just came about.

When it's my day to pick her up and take her back to my house, it seems a bit like going to meet your first love. I feel terribly excited – there's nothing quite like it. Apart from my one day a week, I try to see her as much as possible but I'm still very busy working as a fashion designer. In this business you don't really retire, so I expected to be a working grandmother but, actually, my life feels wonderfully full.

Having a granddaughter has brought me closer to Shebah. We used to talk to each other every day but now it's perhaps two or three times a day. I'd love to have more grandchildren and I'm sure, in time, I will. I envisage having a bit of a crèche going on at my house. That would be wonderful.'

'Having a grandchild is like having a love affair – you yearn to be together'

Journalist and broadcaster Eve Pollard, 63, is also vice-chair of the charity WellBeing of Women. She lives in London with her husband Sir Nicholas Lloyd and has two grown-up children and one grandson, Jake, three

'My daughter, TV presenter Claudia Winkleman, has always wanted children, so when she first told me she was pregnant, I was delighted for her.

I didn't feel too young to be a grandma. I enjoyed the fact that I could pass on my experiences as a mother to Claudia. We talked a lot and discussed any worries she had. The most important advice I gave her was that she'd need help after the baby was born. My present to her was a maternity nanny. Now she's pregnant again, though, she's learned from her own experiences and doesn't need advice from me.

When Jake was born, I fell instantly in love with him. I can only describe the relationship between grandmother and grandchild as a love affair. It's like being in a new relationship – you think about them all the time and yearn to be with them. Then, when you're together, you worry about whether they like you and how to please them and make them laugh!

These days, it's not just the old-fashioned image of a knitting grandma that has changed. The practicalities are different, too. One difficulty facing some grandmothers is that they aren't free to do a lot of childcare because they still have careers and busy social lives of their own. I'm still working – in fact, I've just finished a novel – but the important thing is to slow down from time to time. You can't be in too much of a rush with a three year old. I live only minutes from Claudia, so I see Jake about four times a week. I realise how lucky I am in that respect, as I can work and still make lots of time for him.

I think I'm a very well-behaved grandmother – I always abide by Claudia's rules about Jake. I don't give him chocolates or sweets. But I do buy him toys and I adore singing to him and playing games. I feel strongly that she must raise him the way she and her husband want to, and I should fit in with it.

Jake calls me "Grandma". My friends suggested he call me "Boo Boo" or some such name, as they thought "Grandma" might age me too much. But I decided that it would help him to understand our relationship and my role in his life. After all, nobody is going to look at me and think I'm his mother! And one of the nicest sounds in the world is to walk into their house and hear Jake shouting, "Grandma, come and play with me!"

Eve: 'I feel strongly that my daughter must raise Jake the way she wants to and I should fit in with it'

In the media industry, appearance is important. When you find out you're going to be a grandmother, it does make you think about looking older, and sometimes I do consider having some cosmetic surgery. Perhaps I'll have a few bits and pieces done, such as a chemical peel, later this year. I just want to look good for my age. But health is also vital when you're a grandparent. Children move so fast that you have to be able to keep up with them. And, of course, glamour is not my top priority when I'm with Jake. It's all about him.'

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'When I'm with them, I'm not a career woman, I'm just Grandma'

Broadcaster Joan Bakewell, 72, lives in London and has two children and six grandchildren, Thomas, 14, Katie, 13, Louis, 12, Max, 10, Charlie, 10, and Maisie, six

'When my son rang to tell me his wife was pregnant, it was a huge surprise. I remember saying, "It can't be. It just can't be." It's difficult ever to truly imagine your own children becoming parents.

When my first grandchild Thomas was born, I was 58 and still jetting all over the world for work. On the day he was due, I was filming a television programme on an oil rig off the coast of Aberdeen. I remember feeling tremendously excited as we waited for the telephone call to come through saying he'd been born. When it eventually did, there was a huge cheer. It had been a long day, but the entire crew went back to the hotel bar to celebrate.

I took the next flight back to London, where my husband was waiting for me at the airport. We drove straight down to Dorset, where my son lived, and piled into the hospital room, laden with flowers and a camera to start filling the albums.

The wonderful thing is that love isn't rationed, so the more grandchildren I have, the more love there is to give. I try not to be the stereotypical proud grandmother who forces everyone to look at photographs of my grandchildren, but I do have hundreds of pictures of them all. When I die, they'll have to airlift piles of them out of the house!

We're all extremely close. I often go on holiday with my son and daughter and their children. It's wonderful to catch up because, like most families these days, we live a long way apart, so I don't get to see as much of them as I'd like. I also have the grandchildren up to stay in London in the holidays. In fact, one of the main reasons I won't move from the big house where I live on my own is that it means I can accommodate all the sleeping bags and pull-out beds that I've amassed for their visits. When they come to stay, I'm not a career woman, I'm just Grandma. I block out my diary and don't take on any work at all.

Joan (centre): 'The more grandchildren I have, the more love there is to give'

My grandchildren are completely unimpressed by what I do for a living. My book, Belief, comes out in paperback this month, so I'm doing a few interviews alongside it, but they're never remotely aware of the fuss. They're bemused that I occasionally turn up on television. When one child was very young, we were watching one of my programmes and she crawled over to the television, banged on the box and said, "Come out of there, Grandma!" To me, my job is just a job like any other but it's lovely that it means I can afford to treat them. What they do understand and take careful note of is the fact that I'm a source of goodies.

I've taken them to the theatre and to all the museums in London and constantly strive to teach them things – I see it as my duty. I tell them stories about the kings and queens of England. I do have to be careful not to overdo it, though, because when I go overboard, they start saying, "Grandma, do we really need to know this?"

I'm very careful not to push my idea of parenting on to my children, although sometimes it's hard not to. When my daughter told me that her son had had problems sleeping and she'd let him sleep with her and her husband for the night, I found myself saying, "I never did that." My daughter just gave me a look, put up her hand and said, "Mum, that was then and this is now." I'm happy to give my opinion when I'm asked, though.

I've got a very full life of my own, which I think is important because children learn through their grandparents what it is to be an older person. And in me they see someone who's out and about, eating in restaurants, going to parties and loving life – as well as being a very proud grandma.'

As told to Jo Ashitt. Elle O'Mahoney. Photographs: Justin Lloyd; John Swannell. Edna Romily wears her own range of clothes. Belief by Joan Bakewell (Duckworth, £8.99) is available in paperback from 6 April 2006

8 great rules for yummy grannies

- **Never say to your son or daughter,** 'I had you out of nappies by the time you were 18 months old'. Even if it's true, he or she doesn't want to know.
- **Learn which is which** of Tinky-Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po. (And Thomas, Gordon, Henry and Percy.)
- **Make sure your clothes have** large pockets and fill them with tissues. You will need them to wipe noses, chocolatey mouths, sticky fingers, grazed knees and so on. Some things never change.
- **Keep a supply of treats** in your house, your car and your handbag to use as rewards, bribes and comforters. If sweets aren't allowed, raisins will do instead.
- **Keep in touch** If you're not going to see your grandchildren for a while, phone, email or text them. Mastering the art of modern technology will help you keep up to date with all their news.
- **Practise folding and unfolding** the buggy or pushchair. Then practise it again... and again, until you really do know how to do it.
- **Don't give advice** unless you're asked for it. Do you remember feeling resentful when your own mother or mother-in-law told you how to raise your children?
- **Take charge of the children** first thing in the morning, if you can, to give exhausted parents a lie-in. In research, more parents asked for this favour than for anything else.

These tips on modern grandparenting come from Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall. You can buy her book, The Good Granny Guide (Short Books) for £10.39 plus postage (usual price £12.99) from the Good Housekeeping Bookshop. For details, see page 64.

Appendix T2

Life just gets better: Andie MacDowell

Life just gets better

Actress and model Andie MacDowell, 47, has been at the top of her profession for two decades. Recently divorced from her second husband, she has a son Justin, 18, and two daughters: Rainey 16, and Sarah Margaret, ten. She spoke to Stephanie Young about life, love and learning new skills

On marriage...

One of the messages in my new film *Tara Road* is that as wives we need to balance spending time knowing our man with personal growth. I can speak not only from personal experience but from watching my close friends' relationships and the point is that often in marriage you lose your sense of self. You just don't know who you are any more. It's so important in a relationship to maintain a sense of creativity and grow within yourself. I'm newly single and revisiting things I missed about my life and learning new skills. It's exciting having the space to rediscover yourself.

On divorce...

When you go through divorce there's a need to prove yourself. The big thing for me this time round is that I don't feel like that. I don't feel obligated to start dating. I'm quite content to focus on myself. I think the right relationship will come along as long as I'm doing the things that make me grow as an individual. I don't believe I'm missing out on anything by not being part of a couple. I am complete and that's a great relief. I still believe in love... just not right now.

My biggest fear in life is to lose a child.

My character Marilyn in *Tara Road* goes through that and to my mind there can be nothing worse. Any joy she had is gone, but she has these incredible people who come into her life who won't leave her alone. When you are stuck in a place where all you can think about is your own misery, it's horrible. I've been there. Luckily, Marilyn's journey means she is forced to think about someone else and see she's not the only one suffering.

I'm happiest at home...

I wouldn't say I'm a big party person, though I enjoy entertaining and my house has been very busy for the past year with people and coming and going. I'm involved with lots of different circles of people and then of course there are my kids. I encouraged my son's basketball team to come over and they had poker nights. I wanted him to enjoy himself as much as possible because he was leaving for college.

Flying the nest...

When my son left home for college it was awful. I spoke to lots of parents and they all said the same thing – that the drive back from college is the longest drive of your life. And it was. I've called him a lot – I always do. When I'm away shooting a movie, I speak to him at least three times a day and leave endless messages, begging him to call me back. But he's been really good about calling since he's been away. It's not because he's particularly homesick, he's just being kind. Before he left, he was the one feeling sad and I was being strong and now the situation's reversed and he's being strong to help me out. His sisters cried for weeks – from his graduation onwards, though they're fine now.

Staying in shape...

I love to exercise. It's my release. I do it because I enjoy the endorphins and feeling of wellbeing rather than because I feel I should. I do something six days a week, whether it's riding a bike or going to the gym. While filming in Ireland, Olivia Williams got me into Bikram yoga and a local gym instructor showed me some great hikes.

I'm loving my life now...

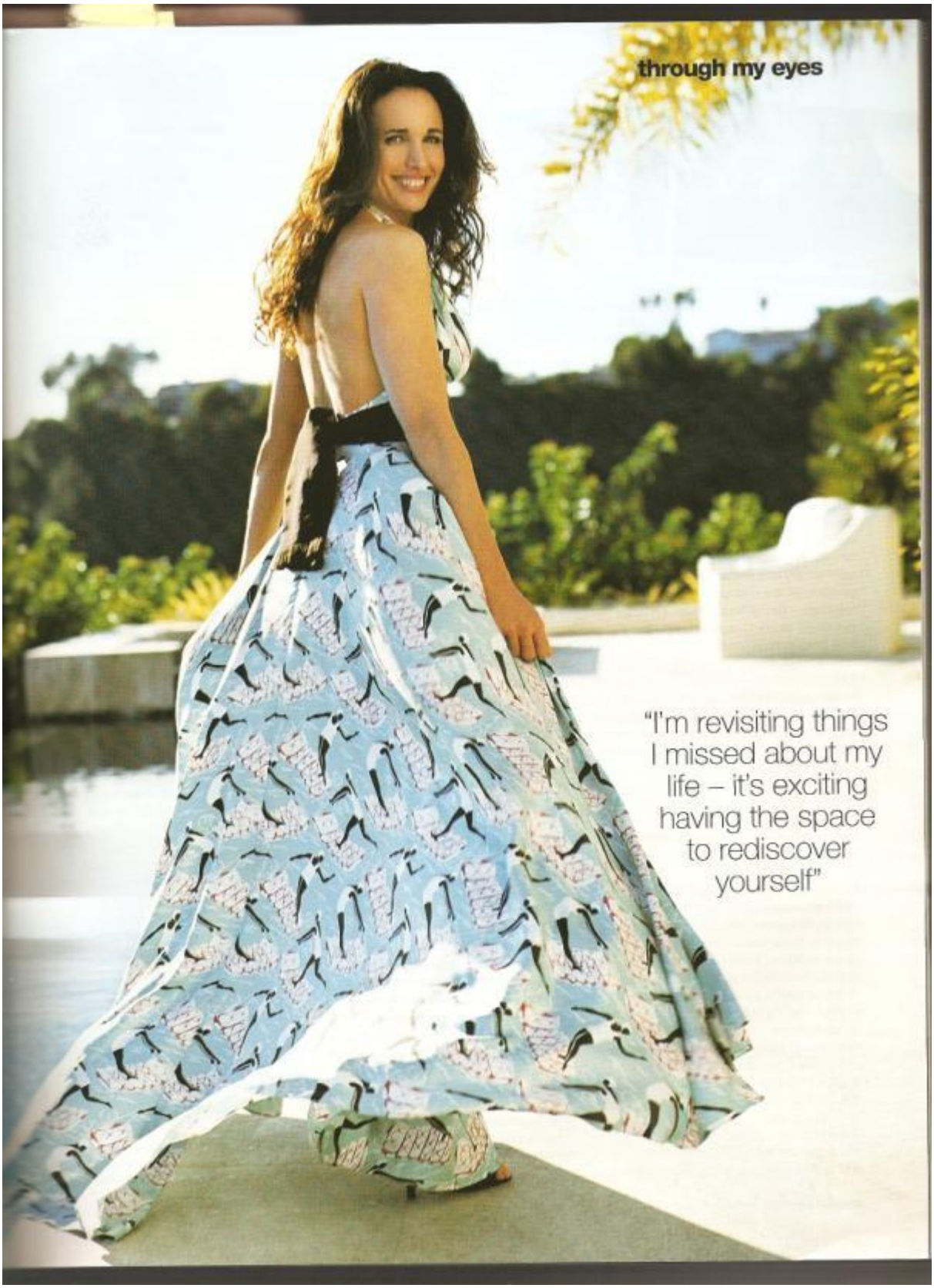
Yes, I'm so content. I have my friends, I'm learning and my children are amazing. I'm very involved in their lives and find it satisfying to watch who they are becoming. My son's just got a great scholarship to college, he's interesting and really cares about the world. My daughters are such fun. They are incredible dancers and I love attending competitions with them. Professionally, there are opportunities for me to do different types of work. I'm also excited about the future. I have a great sense of curiosity and a firm belief that there are lots of wonderful things for me to do out there when I'm 80. And I've got a lot of time before then. It doesn't feel like it has to be today – I can do it tomorrow.

I've learnt to be selective with my friendships...

Friends have always been an important part of my life, but now I've started to use more discretion when forming friendships. In my thirties, I had a tendency to be friends with anyone and everyone. In my forties, I started examining my friendships and thinking about how spending time with different individuals made me feel – I don't want to be with people who beat me down. At this time in my life, I value deeper relationships with people who understand me. I have one really good friend who I bonded with over our love of horses and I'm very close to one of my sisters who lives down the road. She's bright and well read and has been very helpful in getting me involved in the community because she lived here before I did – I moved here seven years ago to be near her and so our kids could grow up together.

Wine and Whine...

I love participating in the community. Besides the book club and gardening club there's something here called Wine and Whine. It's basically a get-together where you share great wine and food and have a good old girly gossip. So far, I haven't been a very good participant, but I'm happy to be in the club – you can't just join, you have to be voted in, so I'm honoured. The trick is to wait until it's being hosted by someone who's a great cook – there are a couple >>



"I'm revisiting things I missed about my life – it's exciting having the space to rediscover yourself"


In *Green Card* with Gérard Depardieu


That moment in [illegible] hit *Four Weddings* [illegible] with Hugh Grant

of people here who make Martha Stewart look like a novice and that's the night to go.

Perhaps my most surprising new hobby is African dance...

I've been going a lot because it's such a diverse group and it's almost a spiritual experience. It takes an hour and a half, there's no air conditioning and they have live drummers and an 80-year-old who plays the xylophone. I took my ten-year-old daughter the other week and it was great fun. It's very expressive, but she wasn't the least bit shy and neither am I. You just lose yourself. By the end, you're not practising the steps – you're feeling them. I may be perceived as being reserved, but I know how to let my hair down.

I would love to do a house-swap...

In *Tara Road*, Marilyn swaps her house in America for one in Dublin. I'd love to dip into another life like that, though I've not been in a position where I can just up sticks and go. I'd have to take the kids, but somehow we always seem to have something on the go that we can't leave. I'd like to visit Tuscany for the summer or the Cotswolds – I stayed there when filming *Crush* with Imelda Staunton and fell in love with it.

On Hollywood attitudes...

I think my relaxed attitude to the movie industry has meant I've continued working regularly. There was a time when I could be pickier about my roles, but I work in show business and it's just that – a business – so of course they're going to make what they can sell. The market place is all about young culture because that's who goes to the movies and I accept it because it's a reality. I don't take it personally, it's just the way it is. I don't think that bitterness is attractive and that's the last thing I want to be.

Having said that...

I do find it odd that you have leading men in their fifties alongside actresses 20 years their junior. It just seems weird, but I think the pendulum's swinging the other way. Thank God for Demi Moore is all I can say. It's not that I'm interested in dating a 20-year-old myself, though I'm glad she's doing it because it's opened up the whole thing of what's okay for women to do.

On flying the flag for mature women...

I like representing women who are no longer children. The baby boomers are all my age now and there's a large market of people who still consider themselves attractive. They're in great shape, they take care of themselves and they're beautiful but they're not 20 and they don't want to be represented by somebody who is. I saw Christie Brinkley at the gym the other day looking fantastic and they are bringing her back because she's gorgeous and because she's 51 and people in their forties and fifties don't relate to someone decades younger.

I've never seen a good facelift...

I don't want to criticise anyone for having cosmetic surgery because it's a personal choice, but I've never seen a facelift that looks good. It takes away the natural beauty you have when you're older. You can't turn back time and be 20 again and personally I've no desire to be 20. I want to be beautiful and I want to be 40 and I want to be beautiful and I want to be 50. What's wrong with where you are?

A young journalist in Italy recently asked me how it felt to lose my beauty!

That girl was about 30. And the thing is, I don't feel I've lost my beauty. But then I don't think I'll feel I've lost my beauty when I'm 80. I hate this fallacy that you're only beautiful when you're young. It's warped. When I see pictures of myself 20 years ago, I don't think I look necessarily more attractive, I just look younger. You don't lose your beauty, it just changes.

In many ways, I find ageing a great relief...

I was at the gym the other day and I always used to run at an incredible speed and I just thought, "No, I'm only going to run hard enough to get a good workout". I don't feel the need to prove anything to anyone any more. It feels logical. In your thirties, you're so desperate to prove who you are, what you're going to be, what you've achieved, all those things you think are so valuable because you think, "It's now or never". Because soon you're going to be 40 and you'll just fall apart. And it's a misconception. I remember people telling me all these doomsday ideas about what it would be like to enter my forties and I keep getting older and it doesn't happen, I simply feel better. You're just as alive in your sixties as you are in your thirties.

Tara Road has its world première on 29 September in Dublin and will be released in Ireland on 7 October. **wsh**

LIFELINES

- **Andie was born Rosalie Anderson MacDowell and was raised with three sisters in Gaffney, South Carolina.**
- **A successful career on the modelling circuit led into acting and after a 1985 appearance in Brat Pack hit *St Elmo's Fire*, her breakthrough role came four years later as the sexually repressed Ann in Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies and Videotape*.**
- **A string of hits followed, including *Green Card* (1990), *Groundhog Day* (1993) and *Short Cuts* (1993) in which she starred with Julianne Moore, Robert Downey Jr. and Matthew Broderick.**
- **In 1994, British film *Four Weddings and A Funeral* cemented her movie star status. Since then she has been back to star in two more British films – *Crush*, which was filmed in the Cotswolds, and now *Tara Road*, made in Dublin.**
- **She is also the enduring face of the cosmetic giant L'Oréal.**


Andie and Stephen Rea in *Tara Road*

The plot: Dubliner Ria (Olivia Williams) meets Marilyn (Andie MacDowell), a woman from New England unable to come to terms with her son's death. The two women exchange houses for the summer with extraordinary consequences.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Andrew Southam/Miss Hagans, Kobal, Rex

Appendix T3

Women & Home October 2005 cover: Jane Fonda


OCTOBER 2005 £2.99
Good Housekeeping
HEALING POWER
Use your mind to boost your immune system
JANE FONDA
on body image men and marriage
ON A SHOESTRING OR BLOW THE BUDGET?
Room makeovers to match your lifestage
NO TRAINERS! NO GYM KIT! NO SWEAT!
Minimum effort exercise that gets results
HAVE YOUR SHORT STORY PUBLISHED
and win a laptop
WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE TO
marry a toyboy
inherit a stepfamily
survive breast cancer
FREE!
Manicure for every reader
See inside for conditions
7 ages of glamour
Style secrets
Beauty info
Confidence builders
From Mariella Frostrup
Nanette Newman
Lesley Garrett
Ruthie Henshall
and more
GUARANTEED SUCCESS
Student grub
One-pot suppers
Show-off cakes

Appendix T4

Ageless Glamour

Ageless glamour

How do other women feel about ageing? Do they dread it, embrace it or is it something they simply don't think about? We asked seven women in the public eye, all at different life stages, to share their feelings about getting older and to let us in on their own secrets for turning back time

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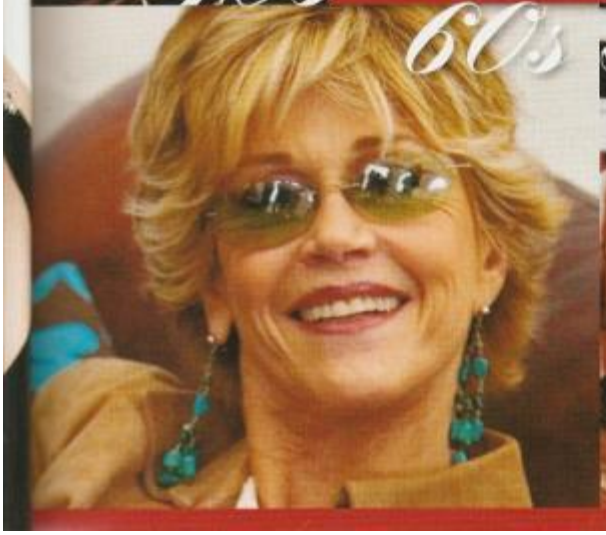


Appendix T5

Realising that good is good enough: Jane Fonda

Realising that good enough is good enough liberates the spirit. And, of course, good lighting is important, too!

60s

Jane Fonda **is 67. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and is mother to Vanessa and Troy and has two grandchildren. Married three times – to Roger Vadim, Tom Hayden and Ted Turner – Jane is now single.**

For me it was very important to think about the way I intended to enter what I call my third act – that is, post 60, heading towards 90, if I'm lucky. I stood back and thought, 'What do I need to do so I don't have any regrets about getting it right?' Instead of running away from the big 6-0, I went into it very intentionally. Facing it that way has made a big difference.

It determines the decisions I make every day. I ask myself, 'Am I really going to be there for my grandchildren or am I going to stay home and, say, read more' – and I know that what's going to matter at the end is having spent time with my grandchildren, not whether I've read four more books.

In a way, there was no roadmap for me in terms of getting older – my mother died when I was young. But I have learned that when an adult – whether it's a parent, a guardian or a friend – is there for a child, it can really affect that child's life. I didn't do that for my daughter and I'm making up for it now. By being there for her children, I can be there for her, too. It also shows her that change is possible – that I wanted to change and I did.

Mothers are dress rehearsals for daughters. Our daughters watch us without even being conscious of doing it; they see how we behave, the way we relate to our husbands or partners. My daughter never liked what she saw; she saw me giving away my power to men and was always angry with me. And I was too afraid to admit that was what I was doing.

My unresolved issue was that I couldn't be myself fully in a relationship with a man. I'd like to have one more chance to see if I could, though, and I do think I really could now. But I had to become a single woman to become whole. In the process of growing older I've also learned that the disease to please – never feeling good enough, always wanting to be perfect – is something men have, too. Not so many of them as women – I think it's almost universal with women – but it's interesting to see it's not just us.

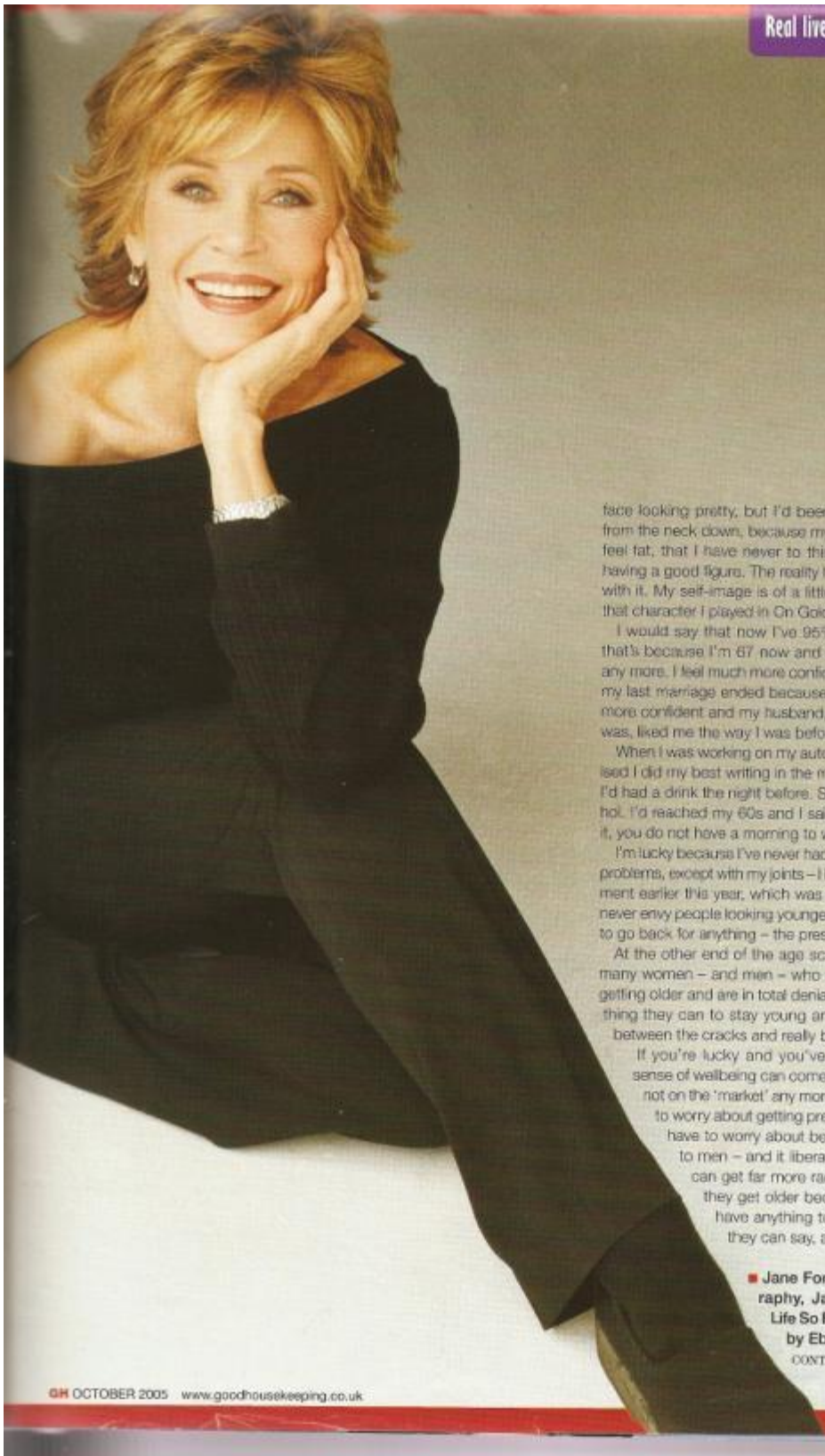
Now, whenever I have a crisis, I go out into the garden and as I'm working, with pads on my knees, little by little things fall away and I begin to see the kernel of what's wrong. I do think your emotional state helps with how you look and feel – the long-awaited realisation that good enough is good enough liberates the spirit. And, of course, good lighting is important, too! The other morning I was putting on my make-up, with a little mirror on the desk in front of the window – and it was like, Oh my God. But if I moved it out of the light, everything was fine. There was a piece in a British newspaper that said, 'Here's a picture of Jane Fonda three weeks ago and one of her today. There were a lot of wrinkles in the first and not in the second – what has she had done?' Don't they know anything about lighting? I can look 100 or I can look 50.

I did have breast implants a few years back. Maybe for the first six months I felt more confident but later I decided to have them out – you lose sensitivity and Ted [Turner] used to say they looked like a couple of tennis balls glued on to a board – and he was right, it didn't suit me. The woman surgeon who took them out said a lot of women my age have them removed – I think it's because you're no longer defined externally.

I'd be suspicious of a man who wanted his wife to have implants, and there are some. I'm also really worried about young women and cosmetic surgery. I spoke at a conference recently in Montana and there was one woman there who gave her daughter breast implants for her 16th birthday.

The pressures to look good are enormous. You go shopping in Beverly Hills and everyone looks alike. People change any irregularity – there's no personality in the faces any more. I've had cosmetic surgery in the past; genetically there's a tendency for fat to collect around the eyes and I had that removed. But I don't want my wrinkles to be taken away – I don't want to look like everyone else.

There have been times when I've celebrated my



face looking pretty, but I'd been so traumatised from the neck down, because my father made me feel fat, that I have never to this day celebrated having a good figure. The reality has nothing to do with it. My self-image is of a little fat girl, just like that character I played in On Golden Pond.

I would say that now I've 95% got over it but that's because I'm 67 now and it doesn't matter any more. I feel much more confident now. It's why my last marriage ended because I was becoming more confident and my husband, wonderful as he was, liked me the way I was before.

When I was working on my autobiography, I realised I did my best writing in the morning, but not if I'd had a drink the night before. So I gave up alcohol. I'd reached my 60s and I said, 'Fonda, this is it, you do not have a morning to waste.'

I'm lucky because I've never had any major health problems, except with my joints – I had a hip replacement earlier this year, which was successful. But I never envy people looking younger, I wouldn't want to go back for anything – the pressures are huge.

At the other end of the age scale there are too many women – and men – who are frightened of getting older and are in total denial. They do everything they can to stay young and end up falling between the cracks and really being nothing.

If you're lucky and you've worked at it, a sense of wellbeing can come with age. You're not on the 'market' any more, you don't have to worry about getting pregnant, you don't have to worry about being as appealing to men – and it liberates you. Women can get far more radical and free as they get older because they don't have anything to lose. So what, they can say, and just go for it.

■ **Jane Fonda's autobiography, Jane Fonda, My Life So Far, is published by Ebury, £18.99.**

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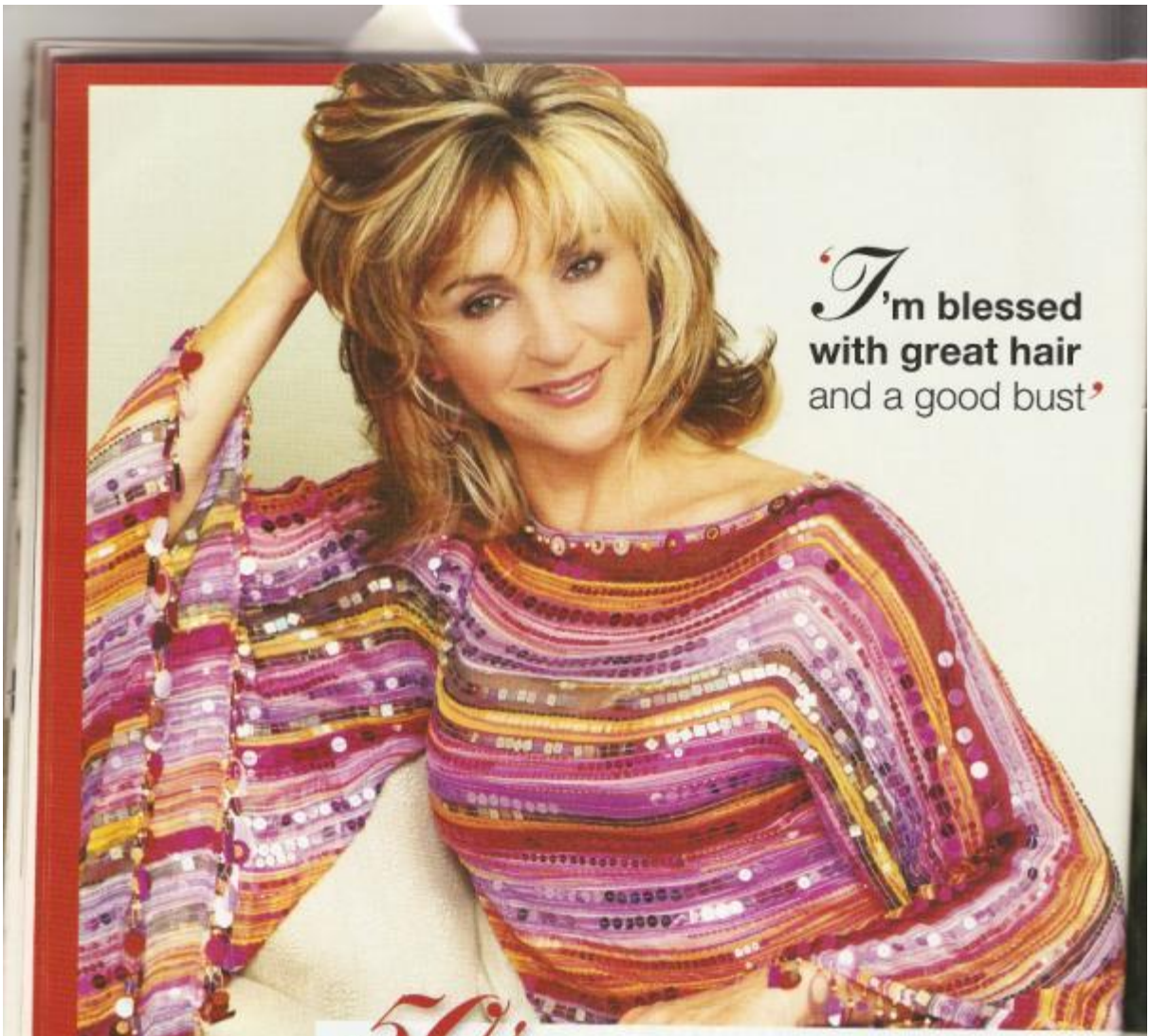
Appendix T6

I’m blessed with great hair and a good bust: Lesley Garrett



'I'm blessed with great hair and a good bust'

50's

Opera singer *Lesley Garrett* turned 50 this year. She lives in North London with her husband Peter and two children, Jeremy, 12, and Chloe, 10.

Being 50 is fantastic. It has exceeded all my expectations. As I headed towards my 50s, I thought my life would be slowing down, but, in reality, both my career and my family life are going from strength to strength. Every decade of my life has been different but fabulous in its own way.

So far, I've had an amazing career travelling the world, singing and releasing records and at each point in my life I've thought, I'm having the time of my life, but it seems to get better with age. Having children has definitely kept me active. Rather than keeping me young, I'd say they keep me challenged, but I love that.

My appearance has changed with age, but for the better. I'm blessed with great hair and a good bust, but I've always thought that God stopped when he got to my waist. I've got a boy's bum and little short legs but you have to make the most of what you've got and a good haircut goes a long way. As I've got older, I've come to love make-up, too. I'm much more confident about my appearance now than when I was younger.

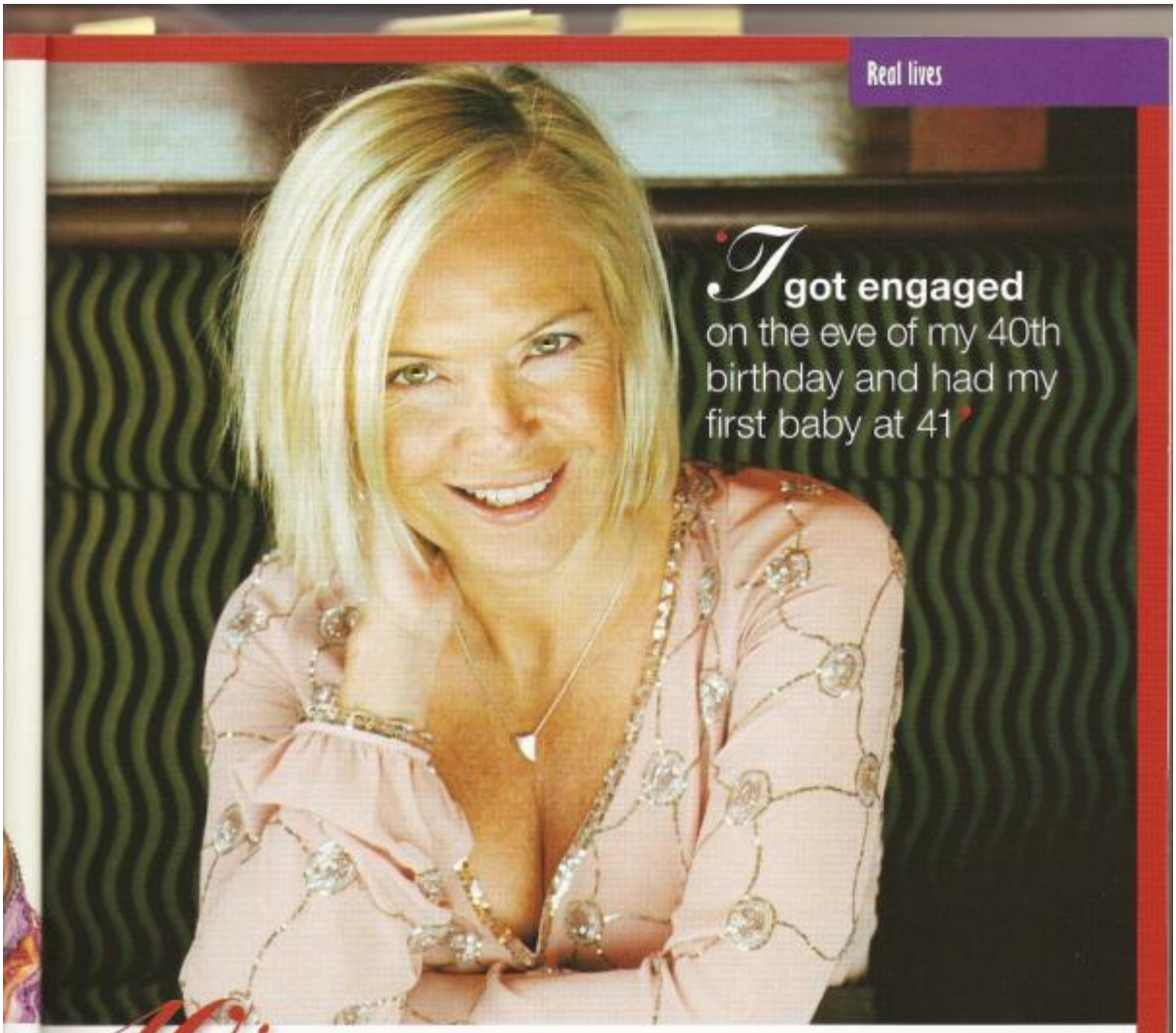
The key to being happy with getting older is to learn and grow continually through life. You need to move on and accept that you will inevitably change with age but what it is to be 'old' is constantly being redefined. Women are now told that age is no barrier and they can do anything and I truly believe this is the case.

I look forward to getting older. It's not something I'm frightened of. When you're young, you're desperately trying to fit in, but getting older gives you the confidence to explore your true style. Right now, I feel the best that I've ever felt.

Appendix T7

I got engaged on the eve of my 40th birthday and had my first baby at 41:

Mariella Frostrup



"I got engaged on the eve of my 40th birthday and had my first baby at 41"

40s

Mariella Frostrup, 42, is a journalist and presenter and lives in London with her husband Jason and one-year-old daughter Molly. She spoke to us while awaiting the birth of her second child.

My 40s – a decade that some people find hard – have been the best years of my life. I got engaged on the eve of my 40th birthday and had my first baby at 41. Life really does begin at 40 as far as I'm concerned.

Having children is a great distraction from worrying about ageing. It's certainly taken the sting out of all the things that are happening – my skin losing its elasticity, my legs getting wobbly and the fact that it's becoming harder and harder to stay fit. I'm sure I'll have a crisis when the children are older and I realise that I'm left to contend with this body.

My attitude to my appearance has changed over the years. I can't remember the last time I took any notice of what's in fashion. In my 30s I thought that if only I had a certain dress or lipstick, I'd be a happier person. Once you realise that's not the way it works, it's quite liberating.

Giving up smoking four years ago has changed my skin completely. It had a dehydrated, papery feel to it and when I stopped smoking, it suddenly blossomed in a way I didn't think was still possible.

One thing that has become desperately important to me since I turned 40 is my hair and I'm sure that's to do with my age. In your 20s and 30s, you can go around with messy, tousled hair and get away with it. But once you've hit 40, you can't afford to look as if you've just crawled out of bed – at least not too much of the time. I've also had to kiss goodbye to mini skirts. I just don't think you can wear them after 40.

You have to enjoy your looks while they last and not put yourself down, which is what I did. I used to think my friends were so much prettier than I was and I labelled myself unattractive. Although on the outside I probably seemed confident about my looks then, I wish I'd been more confident inside myself. I look back at pictures of myself in my 20s and think, actually you didn't look half bad, whereas back then I used to think I was the ugliest girl on the block.

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Appendix T8

I love him- but can’t have sex if I’m sober

WO 22/5/06

I love him – but can't have sex if I'm sober

Q I'm an attractive 34-year-old and have been with my 46-year-old boyfriend for almost 18 months. We get on really well, and he spoils me rotten. But even though he's nice-looking, I don't like the sight of his naked body and always have to have a few drinks first if I know we're going to have sex. He's asked me to marry him, and I'm tempted because he treats me so well, but do you think the fact that I don't find him physically attractive could cause problems?

A If you're having to knock back a few glasses of vino before leaping into the sack with him, I'd say it already is! You've obviously found yourself a good man and are desperate to hang on to him. But agreeing to marry him when you've got such a big problem with the physical side of your relationship is utterly unfair to you both. You don't say what it is about his body that you don't like or whether or not it's something you think can be resolved – e.g., through diet and exercise – but if not, it's hard to see how you can remain in this relationship without becoming as attached to booze as you are to your man. If you care for him as much as you say you do, he deserves to know the truth. But if you don't feel able to tell him, take it as a sign that you shouldn't marry him either.

Scared to have sex

Q I'm scared to have sex and think I'm suffering from vaginismus. I don't like being touched down below and don't like touching myself either. Also, I've never been able to insert a tampon. One of my fears about sex is that it's going to hurt, and I suppose I think it's dirty, but I don't know why I think that way as nothing bad has ever happened. I really don't know how to get this problem sorted – and am scared that I never will. There's no way I

SEX FILES

A newlywed pensioner has been arrested for having sex with his bride while driving away from the reception in Italy. Officers pulled the Fiat Punto over after watching it veer down a busy road. Inside, they found the partially naked 70-year-old man being straddled by his 59-year-old bride. Must have been a bum steer!

Should I take my ex back?

Q I've been with my boyfriend now for

been. Only when you see him again will you know whether what you had was special enough

Appendix T9

Mind the gap: Linda Honeyfield

THE **BELLA REPORT**

MIND THE GAP!

When an older man marries a younger woman, nobody bats an eyelid. But when Demi Moore, 43, tied the knot with her 27-year-old toyboy lover Ashton Kutcher in September, it caused a real stir. And such love matches aren't only seen in Hollywood. With our free and easy rules of engagement, age is no longer a stumbling block to love. But when the generations fall for each other is it simply a case of true love – or is someone's age part of the attraction? Here three Bella readers share their experiences

REPORT

He makes me feel younger

Mum-of-two Linda Honeyfield, 58, from Hextable, Kent, got together with her 40-year-old partner James Bottger 13 years ago

When I got divorced at the age of 45 I joined a club to meet other separated people.

One night a group of men in their 20s came up to talk to me. They pointed to their friend.

'He wants to dance with you,' they said.

'I don't think so,' I replied.

I thought they were having a laugh at my expense. But then the young man introduced himself. 'My name's James,' he said. 'I really do want to dance with you.'

I gave in and danced with him for a while. He was 27.

My friends thought it was hilarious.

'Are you going to take him to school with his lunchbox?' they joked.

But James was very persistent. 'Will you meet me for a drink?' he asked.

Eventually I agreed and we really hit it off.

Soon we started meeting regularly. I still went out with my friends to try and meet someone my own age but no one I met could compare to James. I soon found myself falling for him.

My children, Carly, 19, and Elliot, 16, weren't keen on our relationship.

They were upset about my divorce from their father the year before and were embarrassed that James was so young.

'He'll go off with a younger woman,' warned a friend. I was sure she was right.

'You're not going to want me when I'm in my 60s,' I told him.

'I'll always want you,' he said. 'I'll push you around in your wheelchair if I have to.'

In time I began to take him seriously.

Years passed.

James sold his flat and needed a place to stay until he found somewhere else to live.

'Can I move in with you for a few months?' he asked.

I liked living on my own but I didn't mind James staying for a while.

It's now seven years later and we are still living together.

James is completely devoted to me. He gives me confidence and makes me feel younger as he has so much energy.

People often stare and whisper about us when we're out together. I get embarrassed but James doesn't seem to care. He's always cuddling me in public.

When we first met

One day the window cleaners came to our house to collect their money when James was in and I was out.

'I don't have any change,' James said.

'Isn't your mum in?' they asked.

James thought it was hilarious when he told me about it later, but I was mortified.

My kids now really like James. He wants us to get married. So who knows, we may decide to tie the knot for my 60th birthday!

● James says: 'There aren't any rules about who you should go out with. I don't want kids of my own – I like my lifestyle as it is.

'My friends and family are happy for us.'

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY:

'Women who are past the first flush of youth will find the attention of a younger man flattering – and they could be attracted to his energy and optimism,' says consultant psychologist Ingrid Collins.

'Younger men may be attracted to older women for their experience, while young women may be drawn to older men because they have more status. And older men like younger women as they are like a trophy. They prove the man's virility and pulling power.'

Celebrity lovebirds who bridge the age gap...

- **Katie Holmes, 26, talking about fiancé Tom Cruise, 43: 'I don't think about the age gap at all. He's incredibly fit and youthful both in body and spirit.'**
- **Calista Flockhart, 41, on Harrison Ford, 63: 'It doesn't faze me. Sometimes I even say: "Wow, I keep forgetting that he's 22 years older than me." It doesn't factor in our relationship at all.'**
- **Ashton Kutcher, 27, on wife Demi Moore, 43: 'There has been so much written about Demi and me and the whole age thing. It's so biased. If it was the other way round, with an older guy dating a younger woman, no one would say a word.'**
- **Catherine Zeta-Jones, 36, says about her husband Michael Douglas, 61: '25 years is nothing. I've never heard of a book or a law that says you have to be a certain age to spend time with another person. Michael doesn't seem like an older man to me, he's just Michael.'**

Calista and Harrison

Tom and Katie

Feature: Janine Kelso
Photos: Alistair Heap, Linda Hanwylkist, Rex, Splash, LNP

Appendix T10

Liz Jones’s diary: how one single girl got married

Liz with The Husband: 'I'm never going to be in the market for a boring old Hunter-Gatherer'

Liz Jones's Diary

How one single girl got married

If you've ever fantasised about what it would be like to have a toy boy, read on. After years as a singleton living with her cats, journalist Liz Jones married a man 11 years her junior. This is what happened next

CHAPTER 32

11 October 2003

Do I look confusingly young?

I am, it appears, indicative of a worrying new trend. I am independent financially (well, I would be if the daytime TV loan people would STOP RINGING ME!) and emotionally, and am therefore never going to be in the market for a boring old Hunter-Gatherer or even a nappy-changing New Man. I am, like Cameron Diaz, Minnie 'I have a very wide face' Driver, Demi Moore and Sadie Frost, in a relationship with a Gardener, as those helpful twentysomething toy boys – the Justin Timberlakes and Ashton Kutchers of this world – are called. One newspaper article said last week that Gardeners are, apparently, better at communicating with older women because they 'are likely to have been raised by parents who have an equal relationship…there is no fear or mystery about the opposite sex.'

The article added that women can 'look confusingly young. You can be 10 years older than your boyfriend and still look the same age'.

I asked The Husband if he thinks I look confusingly young. 'Ummmm,' he said. 'You are good for your age, but it's obvious you are much older than I am.' He then added that he has always fancied Helen Mirren; interesting, but not particularly helpful.

I was looking at a picture of my mum the other day, holding me at my christening. She had her hair in a neat top knot and was wearing a black skirt suit, court shoes and stockings. She had probably, earlier that day, baked a Victoria sponge. She was exactly the same age as I am now, but looking down I am at this moment wearing plain Maharishi combats that are falling off my hips, a tiny black Prada T-shirt, Brazilian flip flops and a toe ring. I don't own a pair of tights, a bra, or a lipstick, but I do own the new Kings Of Leon album (very nice young men). I squeeze in three visits to Holmes Place gym during the week (the only thing my mum probably did three times a week was buy lard) and drag my tired corpse from the cross trainer to the spinning class, trying to avoid eye contact in the mirrors. I go running around London Fields at the weekend to stave off osteoporosis at the risk of being brutally murdered. But CONTINUED OVER PAGE

perhaps I am starting to look like mutton dressed as lamb. I admit I have started to hanker after the Inspector Morse box set. I ask The Husband if he would have asked me out if he had known how old I was from the outset.

'Probably not,' he says, with remarkable candour. 'But it's too late now. I have to hang around in case you break your hip, or develop shingles. And who would bring you a ginger nut in bed?'

12 October 2003

I write a list

I no longer go out. Take last Monday. A friend called to say she was having a book launch on the roof of the Berkeley Hotel. Once the promise of free champagne would have been tempting. Now, however, I prefer to dash home straight from work, eager to see The Husband and nest on the sofa. For the past couple of evenings, though, he has been less than enthusiastic upon my arrival. The other night when I got home, he stayed in his 'office' (I use the term lightly) and didn't even emerge to greet me.

When I demanded to know what was wrong, he said, 'What do you expect? A bloody red carpet?' I hate it when The Husband swears at me; surely this must qualify as abuse? I always thought that newly-weds should behave like Robert Redford and Jane Fonda in the first reel of Barefoot In The Park, but apparently not.

So, last Friday, as punishment, I went out for a drink with Kerry and Emine (it was like a scene from Sex And The City, only with lower heels).

'Will Nirps have dinner ready when you get home?' Kerry piped, innocently.

'Well, he might start rattling a few pans – which are now burnt, by the way – but more often than not he's watching the Channel 4 news or having a nap.'

'You're far too soft,' said Emine sagely, despite her 24 years. 'My boyfriend always makes dinner, gets up before me just so that he can run my bath, does my ironing once a week and is very good with spiders.'

'Kevin always gives me a lift to work, changed the light bulb in the bathroom on only the second time of asking, and painted my sitting room,' said Kerry proudly. Kevin not only knows how to surf (actual waves, not the internet) and ride a motorbike, but also has a bank account. (The Husband has a Post Office savings book containing minus £8.) 'What you need to do,' she continued ominously, 'is write a list.'

So, this morning, I wrote down all the things I need doing, from the new light bulb on the stairs ('But where do I find a bulb?'), to the shirts I need ironing and starching, the shower room that needs repainting and a good dose of Cillit Bang, and the car that needs cleaning. I didn't even bother mentioning things like shelves or cutlery drawers or what he could polish with Brasso because he will just think I have gone mad. He is being very mean. There was a time when he would massage my shoulders in the bath; now he just tells me off for using the hot water.

11 January 2004

He buys the wrong sea salt

Very soon, The Husband will pass the milestone that is 30 (he's a Capricorn). For the past few weeks, he has been moping about the house in a fit of depression over his lost youth, examining his hairline in my magnifying mirror. He says he feels old beyond his years.

'How?' I ask him, grumpily. 'You are not at all domesticated. Despite living here for three years, you still don't know how the central heating works.' (The other day, I asked him if it was timed to come on and he replied, 'How should I know?')

'I go to Tesco,' he says.

That's true. Last weekend, while I was having a marathon sleep-in with the two tabbies, he took himself off to do a weekly shop. Even though he forgot quite a few items, such as dishwasher tablets, and got a few things horribly wrong – he bought ordinary sea salt, not the one that is hand-skimmed from 2,000-year-old ponds (Rain Tree Fleur de Sel, £2.19 from Waitrose), non-organic milk, and giant bottles of fizzy water (only San Pellegrino has the correct forcefulness of fizz) – I kept quiet. He had remembered the Charmin Ultra, the lily beans and the vegan wine.

He says he feels like one of the victims on Queer Eye For The Straight Guy, the reality TV show in which an unreconstructed man with a hairy back and terrible shoes is made over by five gay men, and initiated into the world of candles, napkins, flowers, facials and ironing.

I remind him that, despite being on the cusp of 30, he is still very juvenile. He doesn't have a credit card. He gets up really early on Saturday morning to watch TV. When he breaks things – mugs, cat bowls, THE BUTTER DISH – he hides them in drawers. He is always whispering on his mobile. Sometimes he goes to bed without brushing his teeth.

I have to concede, though, that he doesn't have a temper. This can at times be annoying ('But they nicked our space in the car park!') and it was only recently that I found out why trivial things, such as a lift not working, or the traffic lights turning red, or M&S deciding to relocate the Italian food section, don't bother him in the slightest. He says that his mum slept every single night in the same bed as her mum until she left India for an arranged marriage in west London, so it doesn't really get to him whether our duvet cover has a count of 400 threads or not. And because his aunties still find it hard to find water of any description, he finds my fizzy-rating mildly bonkers.

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'I admit I have started to hanker after the Inspector Morse box set'

perhaps I am starting to look like mutton dressed as lamb. I admit I have started to hanker after the Inspector Morse box set. I ask The Husband if he would have asked me out if he had known how old I was from the outset.

'Probably not,' he says, with remarkable candour. 'But it's too late now. I have to hang around in case you break your hip, or develop shingles. And who would bring you a ginger nut in bed?'

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18 January 2004

He loses his temper

Having written last week that he never loses his temper, I'm afraid I am going to have to report otherwise. Last Thursday morning he proved me very wrong indeed. He was driving me to the station at 7.30 in the morning when he suddenly said, 'Why do you have to let the alarm beep over and over again? Why can't you just set it for the time that you actually want to get up?'

I thought this was charming. I responded by gulping, 'Well, perhaps I'm tired from working a 65-hour week and getting home and finding that you have done absolutely nothing, as usual.' Then I'm afraid I let the feminist side down somewhat by allowing huge, fat, globular tears to roll down my face and splash on my nice clean shirt.

29 February 2004

The incident with the oven glove

For any woman out there who is contemplating proposing to her long-term partner or that nice boy with the twinkly eyes she sees on the train every morning, my advice is: don't!

My vast experience of chasing men shows that it never, ever works. I've tried the subtle approach – stalking for two years, buying the house next door – and the rather more direct one, in that I asked a man out (he said no).

Anyway, I have found out to my extreme disappointment that men are not worth all the effort.

Last week I settled down with Snoopy in front of The Office. A few moments later, I heard a yell from downstairs.

'Lizzieeee!' he shouted. I jumped out of my skin, thinking that something awful had happened, such as Squeaky pulling a boiling kettle off the hob.

'What?'

'Why did you throw away the oven gloves?' He was really shouting, so I covered Snoopy's ears. He stormed into the room clutching the new, giant cream oven glove I had bought in the Liberty sale. I had thrown the old double ones away because they were frayed and faded. 'What use is this, except for someone with only one arm?' he screamed.

I almost replied that it would be useful if ever Squeaky required eye drops, but instead said calmly, 'Don't ever shout at me like that again.'

'Don't spout that feminist rubbish,' he said. 'If I lose my temper, I shout. If you don't like it, show me the door.'

With that, he disappeared off to bed, and I sat there all alone, watching David Brent, with tears diluting my pasta sauce. I considered sleeping in the spare room, but decided that would only make Susie disoriented.

'If you ever talk to me like that again, I'll leave,' I had said as a passing shot.

'Oh really, where are you going to go?' he'd replied nastily.

'To my mum's, with Squeaky because the tabbies don't like change.'

I phoned my sister Sue, and she started telling me about a particularly stressful week at work when she had to go on a course, rush home to pick up her little boy because her partner couldn't, make dinner, combat crumbs, stack the dishwasher and rearrange the laundry that was drying in the living room. I asked whether she missed her life as a single woman, when her drawers were full of ironed knickers, when she had the time to make her own pot pourri, and every episode of Thirtysomething was videoed, neatly labelled and arranged chronologically.

'Yes, of course,' she said, 'but now that Joe is six, I can at long last sit down and watch Pal Joey on DVD.'

Is that what I have to look forward to if we ever have children: several years without TV? Being single is hugely underrated. Oh, for the days when I would get home and everything was as I left it, or when I could choose what film I would see in the cinema, and buy oven gloves with impunity.

'What I need,' I whispered to Snoops, 'is a bit of me time.'

So I have booked myself in to a retreat in Dorset: no phones, communal vegan dinners, hot basalt and marble treatments and shamanic healing. I need to regain my inner calm.

I have become rather concerned, of late, that I am losing my looks. My life has become a lot less glamorous. I used to swan about, hobnobbing with supermodels (an activity that did not involve any type of biscuit), sitting in the front row of couture. And, as part of my role as ambassador for normal women, I felt it my duty to road test as many spa treatments as humanly possible. At places as diverse as Strawberry Hill in Jamaica, the Palace hotel with Leg School atop Capri and the Bliss spa in Manhattan, every extraneous hair was eradicated, the soles of my feet transformed into those of a baby, and I was able to pass the pore-strip challenge.

Now, though – and I blame The Husband for making me feel secure enough to cancel the Aveda booking and go to the Organic Pub instead – I have reverted to my natural state.

So I am in the retreat, reading Bergdorf Blondes, when my mobile rings. I leap on it, fearing I will be evicted. It's him. 'Lizzie, Squeaky is wearing the cat flap again.'

I feel dreadfully homesick.

'I blame The Husband for making me secure enough to cancel Aveda and go to the Organic Pub'

■ **Good Housekeeping readers can buy Liz Jones's Diary...How One Single Girl Got Married (Quadrille, £12.99) at the special price of £10.99 with free p&p. To order, call 01256 302699, quoting ref EA8 and your credit card details.**

Words: Liz Jones. Photographs: Uli Pelzer. Camera Press